



Weekly

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**Massacre in Grozny**

RUSSIAN heavy guns pounded the Chechen capital Grozny a few days after Russian President Yeltsin celebrated the fifth anniversary of the so-called Putch on 19 August, writes Abdelf-Malek Khalil from Moscow.

Over 40 Chechen civilians were butchered yesterday in separate attacks on a column of refugees fleeing intense fighting in Grozny. Huge explosions rocked the city yesterday after Russian warplanes embarked on a ruthless aerial bombardment of Chechen separatist positions in the breakaway republic.

It is becoming clear that ending the Chechen war holds the key to Yeltsin's successor, whoever resolves the Chechen crisis captures the Kremlin throne. A vicious power struggle is taking place as Yeltsin's men jostle for position in anticipation of his demise. The ailing Yeltsin has refused to name his heir. The entire country is in political limbo, restlessly awaiting the results of the president's many medical 'check-ups'. The only man who seems to get things going is Yeltsin's National Security Advisor or General Alexander Lebed.

The bloody conflict in Chechnya started in December 1994, when Yeltsin sent the Russian army into the tiny Caucasian republic to crush its bid for independence. More than 40,000 civilians have been killed and half a million Chechens have become refugees.

**Ikeda visit**

JAPANESE Foreign Minister Yukio Hatoyama arrived in Cairo yesterday on the first leg of a visit that will include Syria, Jordan, Israel, and Gaza.

Ikeda will present President Hosni Mubarak with Japanese plans for the construction of a \$150 million bridge over the Suez Canal. Work on the bridge is expected to begin in the spring of 1997, with Japan underwriting 60 per cent of the cost.

The Japanese delegation, met yesterday by Prime Minister Kamal Ganzouri and Foreign Minister Amr Moussa, discussed means of furthering the peace process as well as measures to promote economic and technical cooperation, including a grant of \$11.7 million for the development of fishing facilities east of Alexandria.

**Kurds warned**

TURKISH Deputy Prime Minister Tansu Ciller warned the Iraqi Kurd leader Massoud Barzani against contacts between his Kurdistan Democratic Party and the Kurdish Workers' Party (PKK), which is fighting in Turkey to create an independent Kurdish state.

Ciller spoke on Tuesday after a special high-level meeting of government ministers and military commanders to discuss the situation in northern Iraq, where Kurdish groups are based, AFP reported. (See Focus, p. 7)

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# Hebron's forbidding file

Israel's new plan to keep a foothold in Hebron could mark the final death knell of the peace process, writes Graham Usher

Israeli and Palestinian National Authority (PNA) negotiators met yesterday for the second time in a week to try to resuscitate an ailing peace process. Both sides are hoping this round of discussions will prove more fruitful than the previous encounter, poisoned by a welter of mutual recriminations.

Israel had charged the PNA with a string of violations of the Oslo Accords, notably its 'illegal' construction of an airport on the Gaza Strip. For their part, PNA negotiators accused Israel of 'prejudicing' the final status negotiations through its decision last week to set up 298 mobile homes in Jewish settlements in the Occupied Territories.

Most Palestinians greeted both sets of talks with indifference, viewing such recriminations as so much shadow boxing. They know that the main obstacle blocking any real movement on the Oslo peace process remains the Israeli army's stalled redeployment in the West Bank town of Hebron, now four months overdue.

On 15 August, Israel's defence minister, Yitzhak Mordechai, presented a 'range of options' on Hebron to the Israeli cabinet. No decisions were taken but Mordechai's preferred plan appears to be one where the Israeli army would enjoy freedom of movement everywhere in the city, effectively reducing the role of the Palestinian police to that of a civilian force.

If so, the plan marks a clear revision of the agreement on Hebron signed last September between Yasser Arafat and Yitzhak Rabin as part of Oslo's interim accord. This committed Israeli forces to remain in around 15 per cent of Hebron to 'protect' the 400 or so Jewish settlers who live there. The rest of the city (where the bulk of Hebron's 120,000 Palestinians live) was supposed to be transferred to PNA control, with the same status as Gaza and the six other main West Bank towns.

Mordechai's 'new redeployment' would place Hebron in the same category as the West Bank's 450 or so villages where the PNA runs

civic services, but Israel retains 'overriding responsibility' on all security matters.

It is a departure that is utterly unacceptable to Hebron's Palestinians, who were hardly enamoured of the original deal on Hebron. Arafat, too, in his meeting last month with Israel's Foreign Minister David Levy, made it clear that the PNA had 'no intention of re-opening the file on Hebron'.

On the other hand, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is under pressure from the settler lobby and certain of his coalition partners not to move on Hebron. On 19 August, settler leaders in the West Bank threatened to occupy Palestinian homes in Hebron and mount demonstrations against the Israeli government should it proceed with even Mordechai's revised redeployment. The settlers were supported by Netanyahu's agriculture minister and leader of the far right Tsomet Party, Raphael Eitan. 'The government coalition will fall if Netanyahu does not respect the accords we

have reached,' he warned on 20 August. The 'seconds' Eitan is referring to are not the several Oslo agreements, but pre-election pledges made by Likud to the settler movement in return for electoral support.

The likelihood is that Netanyahu will press Arafat to accept the new deal on Hebron in exchange for reciprocal concessions such as further easing Israel's closures of the Occupied Territories and allowing Orient House to stay open in Jerusalem. A meeting is due sometime this week between Mordechai and Arafat where some such trade-off is likely to be suggested.

The question Palestinians are asking themselves is whether Arafat will again climb down in an attempt to keep the Oslo process afloat. Past practice suggests the PLO leader may fudge a deal on Hebron so as to force Israel to start Oslo's final status talks on Jerusalem, settlements, refugees and borders. But Arafat's previous conciliatory stance was always influenced by the fact that a Labour government

was in power, which the PLO leader believed, had accepted the idea of a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza. Now he is dealing with a Likud government which rejects Palestinian statehood and is committed to expanding Jewish settlements throughout the West Bank. So why concede on Hebron?

There are also domestic pressures on Arafat not to budge on Hebron. Recent weeks have seen clashes in Nablus and Tulkarm between the PNA's security forces and Palestinians over the PNA's endemic use of torture in its prisons. The 88-member Palestinian Legislative Council has repeatedly demanded that the PLO leader make his myriad police forces accountable to the rule of law. They have also urged the PNA to 'suspend' the Oslo process should Israel expand settlements or renege on the agreement on Hebron. The stage is therefore set for a crisis in the peace process over Hebron. And the mood on the Palestinian street is that while such a crisis may not be desirable, it has long since been necessary.

## The Middle East according to GOP

Arabs count for zero at the Republican convention, reports Hoda Tawfik from San Diego

It is convention season in America, but what is in store for Arabs? Questions of foreign policy are comparatively unimportant during American presidential campaigns. United States President Bill Clinton has his eye on domestic policy; foreign policy is of secondary importance to him.

The margin between Republican presidential nominee Bob Dole and President Clinton has been narrowing since the successful Republican convention in San Diego, rather to Dole's benefit. The race between Dole and Clinton is of more immediate interest to Arabs. To the American voter the issue is the economy, taxes and the future of America. But to the world outside it is what kind of foreign policy America will lead. To us in the Arab world, it is the Middle East peace process.

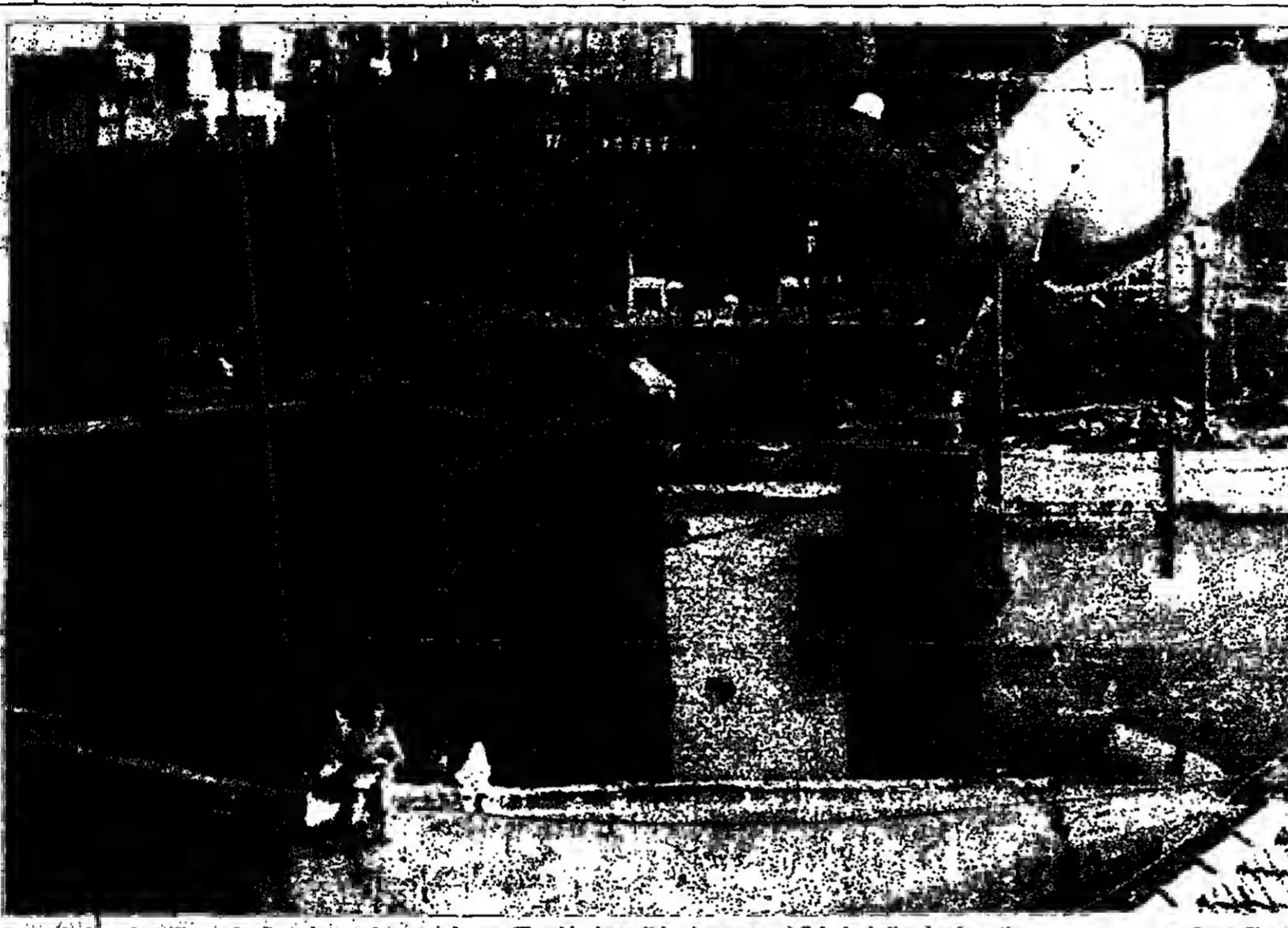
Probably foreign policy might not play much of a role in the campaign. But even so, the voter would like to know how the winner would deal with a post-Yeltsin Russia, a post-Deng China, or a Bosnian blow-up after inauguration in January. The American voter is unlikely to get very clear answers before November. For the Arabs, it might be a very long wait.

In the Arab world, the peace process has turned into a sacred cow—one that can neither be milked nor killed. A comparative reading in both Democratic and Republican platforms gives the Arabs little hope as far as the peace process is concerned.

And what about Israel? It goes without saying that a change in the administration, suits Netanyahu better. He would prefer to deal with Dole as president. A Republican administration in Washington would mean a new start from scratch, and the Oslo Agreements would be of no consequence.

Peace in the Republican platform is seen as the assurance of exclusive security to Israel and America. 'We will judge the peace process by the security it generates both for Israel and for the US... In that context we support Israel's right to make its own decisions regarding security and boundaries,' the Republican Party platform stated.

Then on a more sombre note it added 'We applaud the Republican Congress for enacting legislation to recognise Jerusalem as the undivided capital of Israel. A Republican administration will ensure that the US Embassy is moved to Jerusalem by May 1999.' There is no mention of Security Council Resolution 242 which calls for Israeli withdrawal from Arab territories occupied since 5 June 1967. The Republican platform gives Israel a free hand to break all UN rules at will.



In the shadow of satellites, a family seeks a cool summer breeze. The ubiquitous dishes have marred Cairo's skyline, but have they changed the way Egyptians watch television? (see special pp. 14&15)

photo: Randa Sheath

## Chariots of fire

A stellar performance by Egypt's Paralympic team in Atlanta has gone a long way to make up for the ineptness of its Olympic team. Abeer Anwar reports



Antar, Mohamed Sayed, Zaki, Goma'a



In the 100m sprint, Egypt sped into third for the bronze photo: AP

earn a medal for Egypt.' Zaki has been training for a year and a half, and had promised that she would win a medal in the Paralympics.

The Egyptians in the stands were also jubilant, offering a chorus of *zagharreta* (joyful ululation) after the national anthem was played for Zaki and, two hours later, for shot-putter, Ahmed Anter. Tears filled Anter's eyes as the flag was raised in honour of his gold medal-winning 13.91 metre throw, which also set a new world record. 'I've delivered one of the things I promised, and there are more medals to come,' said an overjoyed Anter.

Capturing the silver in the same event was Ashraf Goma'a. And, in the men's discus throw, Ayman Mohamed finished third behind two Polish athletes, earning for Egypt a bronze, and the country's fifth medal.

The story behind Egypt's sixth medal is one of loss and triumph. While Egypt's Omar Abdel-Latif shattered the existing world record in the 50m butterfly, the French swimming coach lodged a complaint with the judges, stating that Abdel-Latif actually swam the crawl. Objections to the charges by Hossein El-Din Mustafa, an Egyptian national team official, asserting that Abdel-Latif used the same style in the preliminaries and to win the gold in the 1992 Barcelona Paralympics, fell on deaf ears. Abdel-Latif was stripped of his medal. However, his teammate, Walid Abdel-Qader, moved up to third place as a result of the reshuffle, and captured the bronze. The seventh medal

came from Ahmed Hassan Sadiq, who took the bronze in the 100m sprint which he finished in 12.65 seconds. As of Wednesday, Egypt's medal count is two gold, two silver and three bronze, leaving the country 24th out of 127.

## KURASAT ISTRAJIYA (40)



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## Obituary



## Egypt's Le Carré dies

Saleh Mursi, who brought the escapades of Egyptian intelligence agents to television screens, died last weekend. Galal Nassar remembers him

Saleh Mursi, the author of the exploits of Egyptian intelligence agents locked in a war of wits with Israeli opponents, died last Saturday of a heart attack at the Marina summer resort near Alexandria. He was 67.

The characters Mursi brought to life on television and in novels were based on real men, who had actually taken part in the intelligence war against Israel. By recounting their exploits and sacrifices the stories aroused nationalist sentiment.

Some of these personalities became better known to the public than the author himself. "Ever since I took up writing, I never dreamed of becoming famous," Mursi once said.

Born in February 1929 in Kafir El-Zayyat, in the Nile Delta province of El-Beheira, Mursi later relocated to nearby Alexandria to pursue his education. In 1948, he joined the naval forces working as an assistant engineer until 1955. In the meantime, he studied philosophy at Alexandria University, where he obtained a bachelor's degree.

Mursi's literary breakthrough came in 1960 with the publication of a collection of short stories, entitled *Fear*. His novels *Saved*, *El-Balil* and *The Liar* published in 1962 and 1966 respectively were followed by a second collection of short stories, *Letter to a Dead Man*, in 1967. Most of these early stories and novels were set against the sea as a background.

Mursi's switch to spy thrillers came in the 1970s at the encouragement of intelligence authorities. Gleaning information from files provided by the intelligence service he authored the script for the film *Ascent to the Abyss*. The film recounts the story of Abla Kamel, an Egyptian aspirant to the high life in France. By revealing the attempts of Israeli intelligence to recruit Kamel and the exertions of Egyptian intelligence to lure her back, the film attracted thousands of viewers. It was a heady mix of far audiences were not accustomed to seeing on the screen. Mursi was pleased, feeling that he had fulfilled a patriotic duty.

Hassan Nafea, a professor of political science, said Mursi's work "re-formulated the political ideas of young people at a time when attempts were being made to give Israel a facelift for the sake of normalisation... It also restored confidence in the Egyptian intelligence service, highlighting some of its bright achievements, counter-balancing the prevailing ideas about the darkish role it played in internal disputes at a certain period of time."

Mursi admits that he had to introduce many changes to the hero's story featured in the television series, *Tears in Impudent Eyes* starring Adel Imam in the role of Goma'a El-Shawwan. He felt the viewers would not have sympathised with the depiction of a bumbling Egyptian who manages to outwit Israeli intelligence and feed them false information if he hadn't made the changes.

In 1985 Mursi published a novel entitled *The Rig*, the story of an around the world Egyptian intelligence effort to prevent the arrival of a rig from Canada, to be used by the Israeli's to search for oil offshore in the Red Sea. Earlier this year the novel was turned into a television series, but met with little success.

Mursi's most triumphant work was *Raafat El-Haggan*, a novel which he later turned into a three-part television series. While working on the novel, Mursi suffered his first heart attack. "I was writing with my blood and heart," he later said. "At certain moments, I did not feel like a man as I compared myself with El-Haggan who faced the gallows every day for over 20 years."

Mursi had become infatuated with El-Haggan, the assumed name of an intelligence agent planned in the mid-1950's into the heart of Tel Aviv where he remained for over 20 years.

The novel sold a record half a million copies and was translated into several languages, including English, French and Chinese. The television series emptied the streets as it kept viewers glued to their screens during the holy month of Ramadan for three years in a row.

The series aroused intense anger in Israel, with Israeli newspapers branding Mursi a liar. But at home, it prompted young people to volunteer for the intelligence service.

Mohamed Nessim, an intelligence commander who "managed" El-Haggan, described Mursi as a "struggling writer who successfully conveyed to the whole world an objective and honourable picture of our Arab struggle. He also managed to instill the ethic of belonging [to the homeland] into the hearts of the rising generations."

Mursi was married twice and is survived by a son and a daughter.

# Centrists to keep trying

Unshaken by their military trial, the founders of the proposed Centre party are pressing ahead with their effort to gain official political party status for the group, but, as Amira Howeidy reports, chances of success are slim

Two days after a military court acquitted three leaders of the would-be Centre (Wassat) party — widely believed to be a front for the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood — the group's founders issued a statement vowing to "continue along the path which we have taken". The statement came as no surprise because one of the group's co-founders, Rand Habib, a Christian, had already applied to the Political Parties Tribunal for a review of the case.

The request for the group to be established as an official political party had earlier been turned down by the Political Parties Committee — a quasi-governmental body charged with licensing new parties. Legal sources believe that the tribunal, which will discuss the case on 1 December, is unlikely to reverse the committee's decision.

The three would-be founders were acquitted by the Supreme Military Court last Thursday. The three — Abu-Ela Madi, former secretary-general of the Engineers' Syndicate, and engineers Essam Hashish and Magdi El-Farouk — all members of the Brotherhood, were on trial alongside ten other members of the outlawed organisation. Of these, two were acquitted, seven were sentenced to three years in prison and an eighth received a one-year suspended sentence. The defendants were accused of joining an illegal underground group whose aim was to overthrow the government by force, and issuing publications which incite hatred of the government regime. Those involved with the Centre party were also charged with sidestepping the law by establishing the group as an attempt to create a legitimate front for the Brotherhood.

The trial, at the Heliopolis military base east of Cairo, was the third in a series of military trials of Brotherhood figures. In the view of legal experts and observers, the sentences imposed this time were light. But in their statement, issued on Saturday, the centrists said: "The sentences may appear lenient, but to those who were convicted, they are particularly severe."

The government, which in the past has tolerated Brotherhood activi-

ties, clamped down on the illegal organisation in January, arresting 49 of its members. Thirty others were arrested later in the same month. The two groups were tried by military courts which sentenced 55 of the accused to prison terms of up to five years.

Those convicted on Thursday include Abdel-Hamid El-Ghazali, a political science professor at Cairo University, Rashad Bayoumi, a professor of geology at the same university, and Mahmoud El-Arini, a dean of Al-Azhar University's Faculty of Agriculture.

The centrists denied that their group was intended as a front for the Brotherhood. Nevertheless, the statement stressed, it "would not be a stab in the Brotherhood's chest". The centrists are an addition to national action, not a detraction from it." The statement expressed hope that the tribunal's decision "would compensate the founders for the accusations and actions they have faced at the hands of the security authorities."

The three would-be founders of the Centre party were among the most prominent of a group of over 70 Brotherhood members arrested in April, nearly three months after Madi had filed a request to establish a political party with the Political Parties Committee. However, during the trial, the charge of attempting to establish an organisation as a front for the Brotherhood was dropped because it is not penalised by law, the group's attorney, Mohamed Selim El-Awwa, told *Al-Ahram Weekly*.

Brotherhood leaders have let it be known that they were not happy with Madi's attempts to set up the party. Following Madi's arrest, Brotherhood sources leaked the news that the Brotherhood's leadership had pressured others involved with the Centre party to backtrack. According to Brotherhood sources, 20 out of 70 members complied.

In any case, Brotherhood sources were understandably doubtful that the group would ever be established as an official political party. "They can do all they want, but the Political Parties Tribunal will ove-

er permit the establishment of a party whose members are affiliated with the Brotherhood," Mustafa Mashhour, the organisation's supreme guide, told the *Weekly*. The court's sentence, he added, "should not be seen as a good reflection on the government just because five people were acquitted. Eight others — university professors, deans and respectable elderly men in their 60s or 70s — were convicted."

Diaa Rasbwan, an expert on the Brotherhood at the Al-Ahram Centre for Political and Strategic Studies, described the chances of the Political Parties Tribunal accepting the centrists' appeal as "zero". Rasbwan was also rejected as "unlikely" the theory that the government acquited the Centre party members in order to foment internal division within the Brotherhood.

Since Madi filed his request with the Political Parties Tribunal, speculation has been rife about the possible scenarios behind the move. Some analysts believe that Madi actually acted with the blessing of the Brotherhood's leadership, who then publicised an alleged split to improve the group's chances of gaining the committee's approval. Others believe that the split was genuine.

"Since it was banned in 1954, the Brotherhood has continued to seek legitimacy. And we should not forget that Brotherhood members have made two previous attempts to establish political parties," Rasbwan argued.

"Who proves my point," he added, "is that if the Brotherhood's leaders were really angered by what Madi did, they would not have contented themselves with such a mild punishment as pressuring the group's founders to withdraw but would have expelled them from the organisation on the spot."

Following his acquittal, Madi decided to take time before talking to the media. "I prefer to wait before making any statements," he said. Masbouh, asked whether the Brotherhood's leadership would continue opposing the centrists, replied: "We have never done this. They can do what they want."

## Relief blends with grief

Judge, whose name cannot be released for security reasons, entered the courtroom followed by two of his assistants carrying a small black notebook in his hand.

Silence prevailed among the defendants, mostly over 60 years of age, and their families. The judge sat in silence on the bench for a whole minute before reading out the judgment. He started with the five acquitted and the defendant who received a suspended one-year prison term. With each name read out, whispers of relief and "Allahu Akbar" (God is Great) could be heard.

But tension rose again as the judge pronounced a three-year prison term against seven other defendants. As soon as the sentences were read, the judge rushed out of the courtroom while family members stood on the chairs and chanted non-stop for several minutes *Hasbana Allah wa Ni'm el-Wakil* (We are satisfied with God as our only supporter) while raising copies of the Qur'an. The sound of weeping mingled with angry anti-government slogans and others declaring commitment to Islam.

The defendants, who were dressed in white and kept in small cages,

covered with a wire to prevent them from touching their relatives, also joined the chanting. Abu-Ela Madi, a prominent Brotherhood figure and treasurer of the Engineers' Syndicate, was seen weeping in his cage although he was acquitted. And Abdel-Hamid El-Ghazali, economics professor at Cairo University who was sentenced to three years, smiled at his family while telling them not to worry.

"Who could believe that a group of old people were conspiring to overthrow the government. We have spent our lives serving this country," said Mohammed Mahdi Akef, a leading Brotherhood figure who used to head an international Islamic centre in Munich, Germany. Two of the defendants sentenced to three years were over 70 while the youngest among the rest was 58.

Mokhtar Nour, a Brotherhood member and a lawyer, told the *Weekly* before the session that "Whatever the verdicts are we will remain committed to our Islamic message and we will not resort to violence."

Nour was one of several Islamic lawyers who boycotted the latest Brotherhood trial because the defendants were tried by a military court. The judge appointed lawyers to defend the Brotherhood figures.

## Syndicates take judges to court

Several professional syndicates are taking legal action in an attempt to speed up their long-delayed council elections. Omayma Abdel-Latif reports



## Refugees forever?

Stranded on the Egyptian-Libyan borders, Palestinian refugees have been suffering for a year without a glimpse of hope. Rana Allam reports

The situation of 194 Palestinians stranded for nearly a year on the Libyan-Egyptian border is only the latest manifestation of the massive refugee problem created by the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948.

The camp dwellers, who include 74 children and 40 women, are struggling to survive under extremely harsh conditions. They now receive no regular help from aid agencies which had previously provided food, water and medicine.

Many of the residents had spent decades in Libya. But they found themselves suddenly homeless when Libyan President Muammar Gaddafi ordered the expulsion of the 30,000 Palestinians living within the Libyan borders in September 1995. Gaddafi cited the 1993 peace deal between Israel and the PLO as the reason behind his decision. If a state of peace now existed, he argued, then "let them [the Palestinians] go home."

According to the Oslo Agreement, Israel is only committed to negotiating the return of those Palestinians who were forced to leave their homes after the 1967 War. Discussion of the return of the 1948 refugees has been left for the final status talks between the Palestinians and Israelis. However, whichever category camp residents fall into, they are united by the fact that while most of those who have already left Libya had the opportunity to take up residence elsewhere, those left Salloum have nowhere to go.

The main problems of life in the camp, residents say, is lack of water, the weather — with little protection from the sun and the wind, which sends dust flying around the camp — the bad condition of the tents and fleas. According to Bassima Nafadi of the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), "Reports by our latest mission to the borders are tragic. Conditions are moving from bad to worse."

The camp, which is controlled by Libyan security men, consists of 47 tents. After nine months of use, they are falling apart, letting in sand, insects, snakes, and scorpions. Makeshift repairs have done little to improve conditions.

More than half the tents have a cemented washing corner, from which water is drained through a hole leading outside the tent where

it dries out within a couple of hours. But it more than one third of the tents, there is stagnant water.

The camp originally had two wooden latrines, which rapidly became unusable and were replaced by cement pit latrines. But lack of funds meant that proper doors were never built. And, as the ground is rocky, it was impossible to dig deeply, and the latrines will soon become full. Only the women use the toilets; the men go to a nearby field which is also a rubbish dump. The wind inevitably blows the rubbish and the stench back into the camp.

However, the refugees' major problem is access to water. As there is no source of water in the camp, supplies are transported from Muusaeed, the closest Libyan village. The village has two wells for non-drinking water. The water from one is salty; the other provides less salty but rather sandy water. As the cost of the clearer water is almost double that of the salty water, camp dwellers opt for the latter. Residents have to pay for both the water itself and its transport into the camp, undertaken by one of the refugees. The small capacity of the camp's water tank makes this a daily chore. But at times, like 10 days in a row earlier this month, the water level in the well becomes very low and the water is salty to use. Each tent is then responsible for providing its own water supply.

For drinking water, refugees have to ask passing trucks, cars or taxis to empty their vehicles' water tanks into cans, for which money is sometimes demanded.

Health problems have been the inevitable result of such poor living conditions, according to international aid sources. Although the camp has a first aid base, there is no guaranteed referral system in case of emergency. Most medical help is given by one of the refugees who is a doctor. While refugees are supposedly able to seek medical treatment in Muusaeed, they are sometimes not allowed to cross the border.

Among the most common ailments afflicting camp residents are multiple flea bites, the sources said. These especially affect children, and can cause infection. The resident doctor has also treated nine cases of scorpion bites in the last month. Despite the fact that there are cases of chronic diseases like diabetes, hypertension, heart disease, asthma and kidney problems in the camp, specialised medical treatment and drugs were last administered 10 months ago, according to the sources. No ante-natal care is available, and although several pregnant women in the camp may be allowed to deliver in Libya, the living conditions and the desert environment is likely to adversely affect the health of their babies, they added.

Camp life has also had a direct impact on the psychological health of the residents. There is a prevalence of psychosomatic symptoms, and the camp also hosts two seriously mentally ill patients.

However, residents see any possible improvement in their conditions as a double-edged sword. A better life in the camp, they believe, implies a certain permanency to the arrangement. The residents believe they cannot depend on Arab support. And, although a half dozen relief agencies have worked with them since their expulsion, they no longer receive any international protection or aid.

So, while international attention is directed elsewhere, the residents of the "Camp of Return" await a solution. "Time is not on their side," said the UNHCR's Nafadi. "Nor are the developments in the region."

The Libyan authorities appear determined not to reconsider the issue. According to So'ad Beshir, the press attaché at the Libyan Embassy, there is nothing new on the horizon. "I cannot devise solutions," she said.

Neither does Israel intend to take any action. "We are very sorry that Gaddafi expelled the Palestinians from Libya and without consulting any international organisation before doing so," commented the Israeli Embassy's press attaché, Leor Bendov. Israel has refused to allow the Palestinians to return to the self-rule area until a deal is hammered out in the currently stalled final status negotiations. Bendov refused to draw on the plight of those stranded on the Egyptian-Libyan border. When told of their conditions, and asked about possible solutions, he replied: "The question of the Palestinian refugees has to be solved within the framework of the multilateral negotiations as formulated in the Madrid conference in 1991."

They [the government] believe that the Islamists are lying low and making plans to take over," El-Sayed said. "But instead of encouraging other trends within the syndicates, the government is planning to create an NDP lobby inside every one."

The Bar Association's Sameh Ashour, a Nasserist member of parliament, expressed fear that the current situation might result in placing the syndicates under judicial supervision for long periods, after their councils are dissolved by the government and until new elections are held.

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## Assassins on video

Three Egyptian members of the anti-government Al-Gama'a Al-Islamiya, racing trial in Addis Ababa for last year's attempt on President Hosni Mubarak's life, have confessed that they were Arab Afghans acting with the full support of the Sudanese government.

The three, whose video-taped confessions were made available to *Al-Ahram Weekly*, are Safwat Hassan Abdel-Ghani, carrying a Sudanese passport with the name Faisal Mohamed; Abdal-Karim El-Nadi Abd-Radi Ahmed, calling himself Hamza Abd-Karim; Mohamed El-Nogheim in his Yemeni passport; and El-Amri Sedig Hafiz Mohamed, also known as Khalifa.

Eleven plotters were blamed for the attempt on Mubarak's life as it arrived on 26 June 1995 to attend a summit of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) in the Ethiopian capital. Two of them were killed on the spot in an exchange of gunfire with Ethiopian and Egyptian security men and the other attackers escaped. Three Ethiopian policemen were killed and two others were wounded. Three of the Egyptian assailants were killed in subsequent raid on their hideout in Addis Ababa by Ethiopian police who also arrested the three standing trial at present. The remaining three are said to be back in Sudan.

President Mubarak, who was not hurt in the attempt, returned to Addis Ababa airport immediately after the shooting and flew back to Cairo.

According to the confessions, the order to gather information about the OAU headquarters in Addis Ababa and President Mubarak's route was given by Mustafa Hamza, also known as Ibrahim, leader of Al-Gama'a's military wing. He and his deputy, Ezzat Yassin, was said to be living in Sudan at the present. Yassin spearheaded the preliminary information-gathering effort.

The third accomplice said he was living in Su-

dan named as Hussein Ahmed Shmeit Ali, also known as Serji, who reportedly left Addis Ababa for Khartoum a few hours after the failed assassination attempt, using a Sudanese passport with the name Faisal Latif Abd-Latif.

According to the accomplices, Shmeit Ali was given the task of receiving the weapons used in the assassination attempt, which were smuggled to Ethiopia through a diplomatic cover arranged by Abdal-Radi Ahmed.

The three said they had served in Afghanistan before settling back in Sudan. The first, Abdel-Ghani, was born in Aswan in 1964. After attending the Teachers' Training Institute, he worked as an elementary school-teacher. Abdel-Ghani said he left Egypt in 1990 for Saudi Arabia and from there went to Pakistan. "We drove to Afghanistan in cars and stayed for two months in a camp called Al-Faruq where we received military training," he said. After the departure of Soviet troops from Afghanistan, Pakistan began rounding up Arab nationals who did not have residence permits, Abdel-Ghani said. "I was detained until the Muslim World League stepped in to facilitate the departure of those Arabs by providing

them with tickets and other requirements," he said. "It was with the help of this organisation that I was able to go to Sudan. I met Mustafa Hamza whom I first met in Pakistan, again in Sudan. Since then I became one of the most important members of Al Gama'a."

Abdal-Radi Ahmed was born in the southern province of Qena in 1967. A graduate of a technical military school, he joined the clandestine Al Gama'a which sent him for "jihad" in Afghanistan. "At a training camp in a place called Sada, we were given training for almost a month and a half. Then we joined the Afghan army and fought against the Russians. Our leader, Mustafa Hamza, did not allow us to stay long at the war front and asked us to go to Sudan," Ahmed said.

Upon arriving in Sudan, Ahmed said he was met by an Egyptian called Osman who invited him to stay — and work — at a farm near Khartoum for nearly a month in 1993. A Sudanese called Mudasir, who worked closely with Mustafa Hamza took care of many problems.

Following the arrival of another group member called Ihab, he and Ahmed were instructed by Mustafa Hamza to travel to Ethiopia. "Hamza told

us to gather information about the country because it is the seat of the OAU and because the Egyptian president was scheduled to be there," Ahmed said. After accomplishing this mission, the two drove back from Addis Ababa to Khartoum to reconnoitre the land route.

The third confessor, Hafez Mohamed, was born in 1967 in the province of El-Minya and barely managed to finish his elementary education. After joining Al Gama'a in 1991, he followed the same route as the others: Saudi Arabia, then Pakistan, then Afghanistan. Also like the others, he was sent to Sudan when their stay in Pakistan became impossible.

The three accused men made it clear that the Sudanese government and the National Islamic Front (NIF) of Hassan Al-Turabi provided active support for the abortive attempt on Mubarak's life.

Abdel-Ghani said the government and the Front supplied the attackers with weapons, threw a security cover for the operation, provided accommodation to the assailants and extended other services such as renting houses, purchasing vehicles and obtaining travel documents. He said his organisation was grateful.

"When the Gama'a decided to assassinate President Mubarak, the concerned committee of the organisation submitted the idea to the NIF and then to the Sudanese government," he said. "Both welcomed the idea. The weapons used in the operation were brought in by Sudanese diplomats and did not go through the [Addis Ababa] airport's customs."

Abdal-Radi Ahmed said the Sudanese government provided a security cover to members of the Al-Gama'a living in Sudan. Hafez Mohamed, noting the Islamic sympathies of the Sudanese government, said it would love to see an Islamic state in Egypt. This is why Khartoum is bound by a close relationship to the Gama'a — a relationship which he described as political.

## Eliminating undue exceptions

**Awad El-Morr**, chief justice of the Supreme Constitutional Court, examines the equal protection clause and the principle of equal opportunities with regards to university admission requirements

Article 8 of the Constitution provides that the state shall guarantee equal opportunities for all. The principle of equal protection before the law is itself spelled out in Article 40 thereof, which forbids discrimination based on sex, race, religion, belief or language.

The court ruled that the list of factors referred to in this article, and upon which arbitrary discrimination may be based, is not exhaustive but merely indicative, an understandable conclusion given the fact that unjustified distinctions may rest on other irrational grounds such as birth, wealth, national origin, social status, political opinion or affiliation with a particular minority.

The Court also held the opinion that the rights and privileges which the equal protection clause safeguards need not be inserted in constitutional provisions. Suffice to say that the right or privilege in question may either be specifically provided for by the Constitution or initially established by statute. Consequently, under the equal protection clause, even rights and privileges which are not generated by or based on constitutional provisions, but which have their origin in a challenged statute, are to be accorded the constitutional guarantee of that clause.

The Court has repeatedly asserted that the equal protection clause was not framed so as to extend mathematical equality to all citizens regardless of whether the requirements set forth for the exercise of the respective right or privilege are met. Rather, it is understood that equality embraces only citizens who are similarly situated with respect to those requirements.

The general and abstract character of the rule of law does not necessarily denote sameness, uniformity or identical treatment. In fact a rule of law, despite its general application to the addressees meeting its requirements, may make different provisions for some as against others, and therefore may involve invidious or capricious discrimination in contradiction with the principle of equality which requires the exclusion of any preferential treatment between persons based on irrelevant distinctions. In other words, equality before the law requires an absence of discriminatory treatment except for those in different circumstances. Hence, legislative classifications which treat differently persons identically situated, are repugnant to the constitution.

The principle of equal opportunities embodied in Article 8 of the Egyptian Constitution as well as that of the equal protection clause, firmly established under Article 40 thereof, were conceived by the Court as serving and advancing the same ends. However, while the equal protection clause confers a negative right the denial of which arises only when the state actively intervenes in a discriminatory manner, the principle of equal opportunity presupposes that the missing opportunity is one which the state has undertaken to provide. Failing this, the question of inequality in the enjoyment of that opportunity will never arise.

The ruling of the Court in this regard relies on the decision rendered by the US Supreme Court in *Brown versus the Board of Education* in which separation based on race in public schools, even with equal facilities, was condemned by the court on the grounds that equal educational opportunities have been provided for by the state, and therefore must be made available to all on equal terms.

In determining whether or not a statute produces unreasonable or arbitrary distinctions among individuals as to their rights and privileges, the court has consistently adhered to the long-established comparative rule applicable in the context of judicial review, namely that of the "rational basis" test or the so-called "national relationship test", according to which a legislative classification producing distinctions among citizens is to be viewed as consistent with the equal protection clause if proven to be rationally connected with a legitimate governmental interest which that classification intends to serve. Hence, a statute is to be void if the classification embodied therein is wholly unrelated to the achievement of any valid state interest. However, the court has never resorted to the so-called "strict scrutiny" test which the US Supreme Court has applied with respect to classifications regarded as inherently "suspect", like those based on alienage or race.

Under this criterion, the most exacting judicial examination is imposed by the US Supreme Court, to the extent that it has been said that the strict scrutiny review is "strict" in theory, but usually "factual" in fact, since the state must show that the statute in question furthers a "compelling State interest accommodated 'by' the least restrictive means practically available", a requirement statutes rarely sustain.

The non-adherence by our Court to the pattern of the strict scrutiny test might be attributed to the fact that the court has never been confronted with statutes that are suspect on their face either because our society is racially integrated or due to the confinement of the equal protection clause, under the plain language of our constitution, in citizens, with the exclusion of aliens in my view statutes which are suspect on their face do exist in the legislative machinery, and it may be argued that the time is not yet ripe for intervention with the destructive test of strict scrutiny.

All the aforesaid principles enunciated by the Court found their enforceable thrust in case no 41, for the seventh judicial year, decided on the 1 February, 1992. In that case, the validity of a decision taken by the Supreme Council of Universities and Higher Institutes was questioned following allegations that it discriminated by favouring specific categories of students either because of their pertinence to a family whose head occupies a particular job, assumes the responsibilities of his post in a designated area, performs duties on a specified date, or was killed in combat. Other beneficiaries of that decision included students attached to remote areas of the country either by birth or residence or who obtained high school degrees therefrom.

In analysing the decision, the Court first referred to the fundamental importance of education to the young in so far as it facilitates their readiness for a better life, their adaptability to their environment and their affiliation with their nation. Due access to attainable and diverse information depends largely on available education, the Court added. The Court also emphasised that the right to education, originating in the Constitution, entitles every citizen to have that "level" of education consistent with his capabilities and talent, and to freely express his choices as to that "kind" of education which reflects his expectations and aspirations.

Undeniably, the legislature may introduce rules for regulating the proper exercise of the right to education on condition that neither its neutral content is abridged nor its vital domain confiscated.

Restrictions on that right, the Court stressed, that either limit the full application of the equal opportunities clause or unduly obstruct equality before the law provided for in articles 8 and 40 of the Constitution respectively, are impermissible, given the fact that higher education is an effective machinery for promoting advanced aspects of any civilised society and more importantly a vital vehicle required for the elaboration of specialists, technicians and experts.

The court also stated, that while education is subject to the State's supervision in order to guarantee the requisite linkage between its objectives and societal necessities including productivity, available opportunities enabling access to higher education totally depend on the attainable resources of the State, and therefore implicates competitive admissions thereto.

Within that context, priorities regarding accessibility to that education, are to be arranged within standardised measures of work.

Bearing in mind that all exceptions embodied in the challenged decision have no relevance either to the nature of the right to higher education or its perceived objectives, or the rational requirements of studies conducted in the respective institutes, that decision which failed to meet limitations spelled out by articles 8 and 40 of the constitution, must, the Court ordered, be branded as invalid.

## Sebai novel grimly reaped

"Azrael's Deputy," a novel by the late writer Youssef El-Sebai that first hit bookshop shelves and the newsstands about 20 years ago, is likely to be banned at the request of Al-Azhar's Islamic Research Academy for making fun of the Angel of Death. The action followed a complaint which a hardline preacher filed with the Academy, charging the novel propagated heresy because it satirised one of God's angels. The Academy, in an assessment of the novel, concluded that it violated the teachings of Islam and recommended its prohibition, sources said. But the Academy's chairman, Sheikh Abd-Mo'ez El-Gazzar, insisted that the book was still under examination.

The source said a copy of the Academy's report will soon be sent to the police so that they may take the necessary actions for banning the novel from circulation. The action is to ensure to trigger fierce opposition from literary figures and human rights groups.

According to the sources, the Academy's report objected to the novel because it depicted Azrael as a lazy angel, who failed to carry out the divine orders post-haste. This is borne out in the novel's last chapter by Azrael's decision to delay harvesting the author's soul for two days to give him time to repent. Moreover, epithets which do not befit one of God's angels, such as rash, stupid and fool, are attached to Azrael in the novel, the sources quoted the report as saying.

El-Sebai, a best-selling writer of love stories, was assassinated in Cyprus in 1978 by two tal-

A work of fiction that has been in circulation for 30 years is facing damnation by Al-Azhar for satirising the Angel of Death. Mona El-Nahhas reports



estians opposed to President Anwar El-Sadat's peace policies with Israel.

In the novel, the author imagines that he had been dispatched to the next world by mistake. He has a conversation with Azrael who, having a date with a paradise nymph, asks the writer to take over his job for a while. The author descends to earth armed with Azrael's tools and a list of the names of those who should die. But — surprise — he decides to leave them to carry on with their lives because he believes that others are more deserving of death.

But soon, it is the author's turn to die. Azrael arrives to tell him that they should travel together to the other world but eventually relents and sends him back to his wife to avoid her. A few may look at her with pity and throw some change into her lap. At night, she lies sprawled in a corner.

"It's been a year and a half since my husband left me... He took me to a hospital in Giza and the doctor said something about my nerves. He said my nerves had gone wrong. He made me stay in hospital for two or three days, then he said I was free to go." It was all a big mistake, she said, "because my nerves are fine, nothing wrong with them. I am fine". She claims that after being admitted to hospital, her husband left her and since then she has been on her own. "But any time now, someone is going to take me away with him. See these buses there, one of them is going to stop and someone will take me with him. Any time now."

It is more probable that she will be taken away in a police van or hospital ambulance if Prime Minister Kamel Ganzouri's recent order that all mentally ill people living on the streets of Cairo — whether or not they have been previously been hospitalised — be rounded up and admitted to mental hospitals is implemented.

In the same week that Ganzouri issued his order, Minister of Health and Population Ismail Salam denied at a press conference that mentally ill patients had been released en masse onto the streets. The presence of the mentally ill on the streets was a "natural phenomenon", he argued, proved by the fact that the US has three million mentally ill people living on the street.

According to Sayed El-Qot, director of Abuqir Mental Hospital in Cairo, Egypt's largest public mental hospital, Salam has promised LE1.6 million for renovation and improvement of facilities, LE9 million for a new residential building and LE6 million for the creation of new wards with 500 beds. Accommodation fees at the hospital

allows him a 48-hour reprieve to repent and ask God's forgiveness.

Al-Azhar's action came two months after it ordered the confiscation of two other books: *The Psychoanalysis of Prophets* by Abdallah Kamal, a reporter for *Rose El-Youssef* magazine, and *The Truth About the Veil* by former judge Mohamed Said El-Ashmawi.

El-Sebai's book is one of several in modern Egyptian literature that ridicule Azrael and it was not immediately clear why it was targeted by Al-Azhar and the others were not. Leftist writer Farida El-Naqash said that Azrael was one of the favourite topics of playwright Tawfiq El-Hakim "and I don't know why Al-Azhar sin-

gled out El-Sebai's work. Also, I don't understand why a novel should be banned 30 years after its publication and after the death of its author," she said.

Literary works should be kept away from religious censorship, El-Naqash said. "They are works of fiction which should be judged on literary, not religious, grounds," she said.

Novelist Edwar El-Kharrat urged intellectuals to take a stand against this ferocious campaign targeting freedom of expression. What is happening is a reminder of the inquisition... The book does not touch on any of the religious themes. This is all due to the current wave of fanaticism."

The Egyptian Committee for Protecting Freedom of Expression, a civil rights group, is planning to file a lawsuit against the Al-Azhar Islamic Research Academy on the grounds that it has no authority to ban books.

"Books are banned by means of a court order, not a fatwa by Al-Azhar, which is not binding," said Hisham Mubarak, a human rights lawyer and a committee member. He called for new legislation to provide works of art with immunity against confiscation.

According to legal sources, Al-Azhar is em-

powered by Law 250 of 1975 to supervise the publication and interpretation of the Holy Quran and the Prophet Mohamed's sayings. But it is not unusual for Al-Azhar to examine other books, and issue rulings, upon the request of the censorship board. Although these rulings are not binding, the books are usually banned.

Short-term hospitalisation is no solution to the treatment of certain conditions, Okasha believes. "There are some patients who need hospitalisation for a period ranging between six months and one year or sometimes two. Ten to 20 per cent of schizophrenics need prolonged periods of hospitalisation. The treatment of such patients provided by public hospitals cannot be compensated for by external clinics," he argued. "And we must keep those who need lifelong hospitalisation until they die. It is the responsibility of the state."

And, since many of these patients have been abandoned by their families, they are the most vulnerable and dependent on the state. The fact that many of them were discharged from public mental hospitals "was completely against humanity and a violation of the 1992 UN charter for the rights of mentally ill patients". Okasha dismissed the "myth" that there is a shortage of beds in mental hospitals, pointing to the fact that 40 per cent of beds in public hospitals are empty. In Okasha's view, "It is the state's responsibility to look after the poor, destitute, homeless and hungry mentally ill people living in our streets."

It is certainly a phenomenon," countered Ahmed Okasha, president of the Egyptian Psychiatric Association, president of the Arab Federation of Psychiatrists and secretary general of the world psychiatric association. "It all started when policy-makers all over the world attempted to close down mental hospitals and instead provide what is called 'community care'. This has proven to be a catastrophe in Europe and the United States... because when the mental

Edited by Wadie Kirolos

Samia Nkrumah, reporting on Jordan's bread riots, traces the limits of Hashemite democracy, while Graham Usher looks into peace dividends

# Jordan's test of democracy

When it comes to pocketbook issues, Jordanians know what is best for them. The recent three-day rioting is the first strong indication of Jordanians' growing impatience with the increasing cost of living following the removal of subsidies on foodstuffs as part of an International Monetary Fund (IMF)-inspired economic reform programme. The removal of subsidies pushed up the prices of some 20 items by 50 per cent.

Last week's three-fold rise in bread prices sounded alarm bells lest further price increases mount further and trigger violence in the streets of the southern town of Karak, some 180km away from Amman, and the nearby towns of Mazar, Tafihle and Ma'an.

Hundreds of angry protesters took to the streets and attacked and burnt government cars, banks and one government office. Even King Hussein's surprise tour of Karak where the violence first erupted did not quell people's anger. Cheers of "long live the king" among the reported 1,000 who flocked to greet him were accompanied by calls for the resignation of Prime Minister Abdal-Karim Al-Kabriti, whose appointment at the beginning of the year aimed at accelerating economic reforms launched in 1989.

Despite inconclusive evidence, Hussein blamed foreign elements, in reference to the followers of the Iraqi-led branch of the Baath Party, for instigating the violence. He confidently maintained that an inquiry

will prove the guilt of the members of this group in Jordan. Relations between Iraq and Jordan have been strained for about a year since Hussein distanced himself from Baghdad and began to criticise its policies.

Parliamentarians from the Islamist and leftist-oriented parties dismissed the accusations against foreign elements. They insist that the riots were spontaneous and not instigated by any one party.

"The rioting is directly linked to Jordanians' disapproval of the conditions advocated by the IMF's austerity plan. The majority of parliamentarians and the people of Jordan are not happy with the government's decision," Essa Madanat told *Al-Ahram Weekly*. Madanat, a native of Karak which has been cordoned off since the riots, is a former member of parliament and a Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) member.

"People are saying it is hunger and not Iraq which instigated the riots. Foreign intervention does not explain the extent of protesters' outrage. You cannot say that a single trend was behind the riots. All parties were indirectly behind it. Even some government ministers and conservative elements were also opposed to the steep rise in prices," commented a Jordanian journalist.

The 16 Islamic Action Front (IAF) deputies, who form the largest opposition bloc in parliament, were the first to announce their opposition to the price hikes.

They boycotted the extraordinary parliamentary sessions held to discuss the issue.

The decision to pursue the IMF programme did not require parliament's consent. It is an executive decision falling within the jurisdiction of the government alone.

"Many deputies who did not boycott the sessions disagreed with the three-fold rise in bread prices. The majority of the other 54 deputies, who continued to attend the parliamentary sessions until they were suspended by the king last week, were in favour of a slight increase in bread prices. But opposition deputies felt that their views were not taken seriously and were ignored by the media," said Madanat.

"Only 29 out of the 80-member parliament did not oppose the government's decision. Kabriti's government ignored the views of the majority of the representatives of the people. As a result, the IAF and a coalition of opposition forces demanded the prime minister's resignation, the dissolution of the government and a roll-back in the bread prices," Bassem Al-Amoush, an Islamic deputy told *The Weekly*.

But the opposition maintains a cautious stance. "We do not condone resorting to violence," Al-Amoush told *The Weekly*. The IAF, which is on relatively good terms with the government at the moment, was absolved by Hussein of responsibility for the riots.

No one takes the relative political plu-

ralism prevailing in Jordan for granted, least of all the IAF. The Islamic opposition takes part in the constitutional life of the country but their outspoken member, Leith Shubailat, who vociferously opposed Jordan's peace treaty and normalisation with Israel, remains behind bars. It is reported that Shubailat's brother published a letter in a daily Jordanian paper voicing his support of the Jordanian monarch.

Yet some still believe that the electoral law marginalised the Islamic opposition and there are demands for the expansion of the number of parliamentarians in next year's autumn elections. "I have always believed that the standard of democracy is now lower than it was in 1989-1993. The DUP, an assembly embracing leftists,

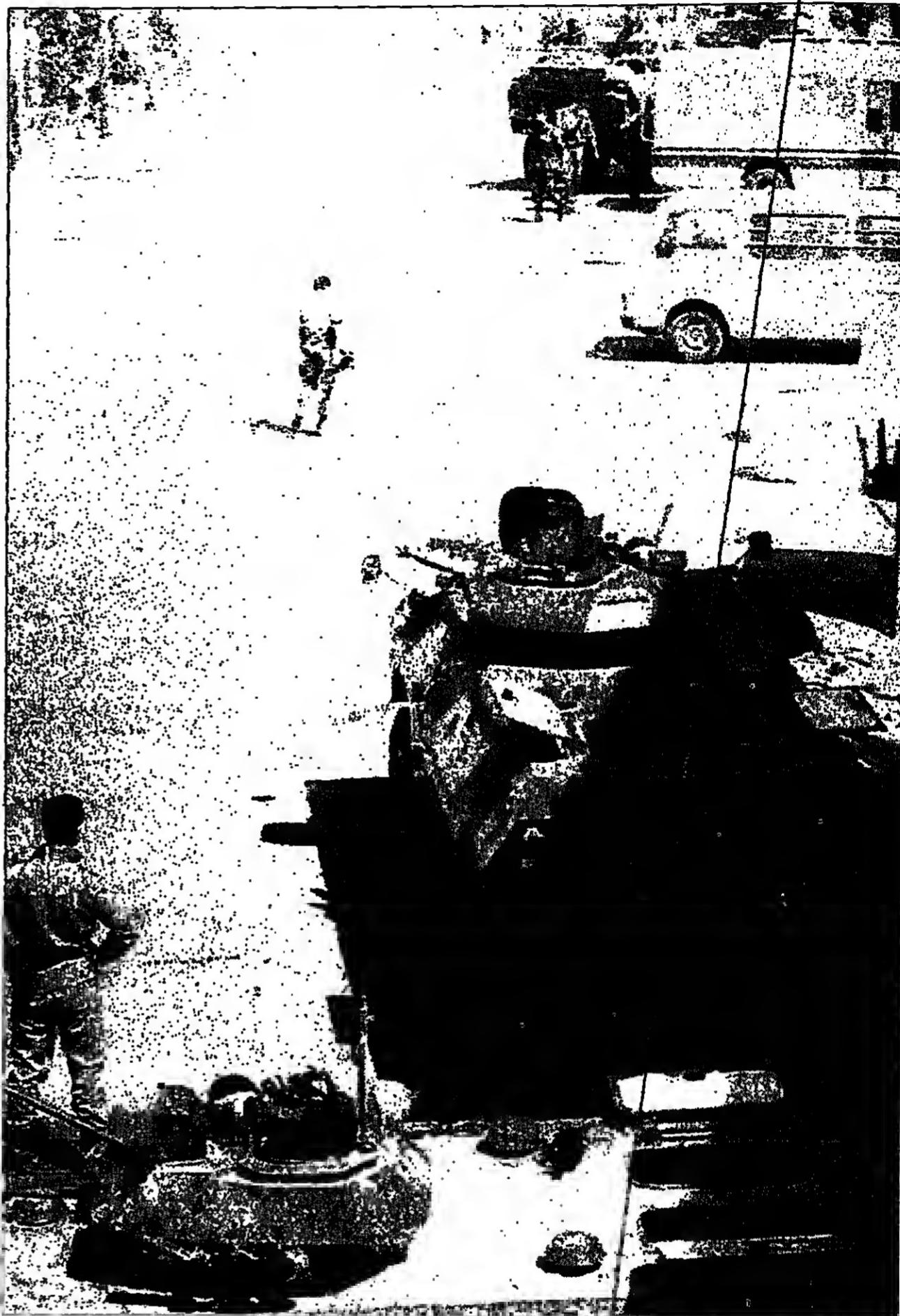
Nasserites and nationalist forces, agreed to put ideology aside to promote greater democratisation," said Madanat. His party has two deputies in parliament, one of whom is the agriculture minister.

Last week's disturbances were rapidly met with the army's tough intervention; deployment of troops outside towns, checkpoints, curfews, beatings and scores of arrests. The well-paid army has always been drawn from conservative, tribal areas traditionally loyal to the king and can be relied upon to ensure internal security. But residents of the troubled areas vowed to continue their protests if prices are not brought down.

Hussein, who is also commander-in-chief of the armed forces, appeared on television in a military uniform pledging to

hit back at agitators with an "iron fist". By mid-week some 300 people were reportedly arrested and the figure continues to rise.

The anti-government rioting of the last few days have been the worst in Jordan since 1989. Seven years ago civil disturbances triggered the first multi-party elections in Jordan. This time round, the government has so far conceded that it will review the price of dairy products which soared by 20 per cent in the past few weeks. Despite mounting pressure on Kabriti to resign, Hussein, the longest serving Arab head of state, is determined to pursue the IMF programme and stand by his prime minister who declared "I am very happy with my government's performance. I'll not resign."



Jordanian police in armoured personnel carriers in one of Karak's main streets where thousands turned in protest against the government's three-fold increase in bread prices (photo: Reuters)

## Peace promises turn sour

King Hussein's attempt to locate the source of the bread protests that rocked his kingdom last week in foreign forces "educated in Iraq" may win him plaudits from the US State Department. But it is unlikely to cut much ice with his increasingly disillusioned subjects.

For them, the real cause behind the riots was summed up by Ali Maddine, a resident of Karak, the city of 100,000 people south of Amman where the worst disturbances took place. People took to the streets less over the hike in bread prices, he says, than over the "government's inability to resolve the cost of living crisis".

But the political context for the unrest has been most clearly signalled by Jordan's main opposition party, the Islamic Action Front (IAF). "We were promised milk and honey if we opted for peace with Israel," says IAF leader, Ismail Fahed. "But the IMF's conspiracy against the people's loaf shows the reality of peace."

When Jordan signed its peace treaty with Israel in July 1994, the king sold it to his 4.2 million subjects (over half of whom are of Palestinian origin) in terms of economic prosperity. It was a message most were desperate to hear.

Jordan had paid dearly for its decision to stand by Saddam Hussein during the Gulf War. Not only was it forced to host around 600,000 Jordanians and Palestinian refugees expelled from Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. It also lost its principle Arab market due to UN imposed sanctions imposed on Iraq. Chair of Jordan's Trade Association, Bassam Saket, calculates the cost to Jordan from the war in "lost remittances, earnings and exports" to be around \$4 billion, a colossal amount given that Jordan's GDP is "no more than \$6 billion".

To make matters worse, the loss of the Iraqi market coincided with Jordan's adoption of a 10 year IMF structural adjustment programme aimed at cutting a foreign debt which, in 1991, stood at \$11 billion. Through a mix of "corrective mechanisms" such as privatising industries, lower taxes and ending state monopolies, the debt has been halved to around \$6 billion. But at an immense social cost.

Unemployment stands at 14 per cent in the kingdom (some analysts estimate the real figure to be nearer 20 per cent). And, says

leading Jordanian economist, Fahed Fanek, "The average Jordanian has experienced a 47 per cent drop in his standard of living over the last ten years."

The remedy for this grim situation was meant to be peace with Israel. "Our comparison was the \$2.3 billion Egypt received from the US in yearly aid after it made peace with Israel," says Saket. But "Jordan didn't get a fraction of it".

The US government wrote off its share of Jordan's debt (around \$700 million) after the 1994 treaty, but has provided little since. Foreign aid this year comes to a misery \$10 million, says Fanek. Nor have the various agreements between Israel and Jordan proved lucrative so far.

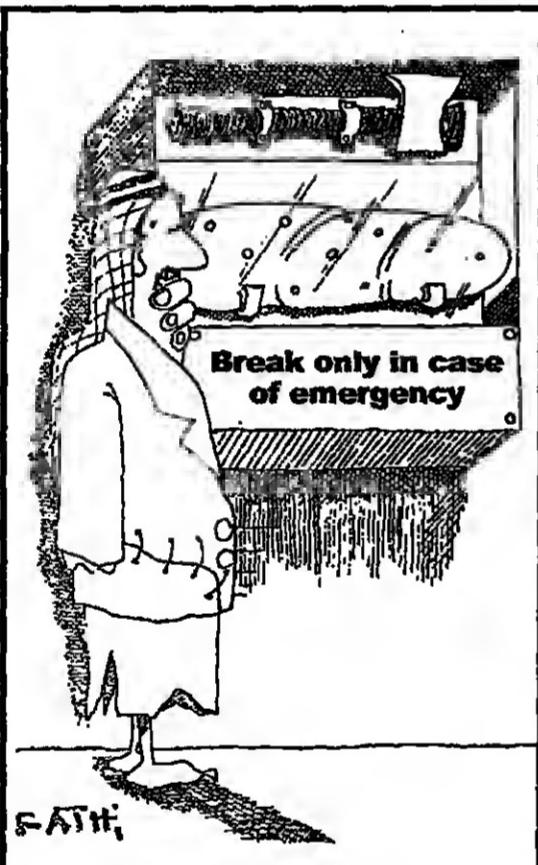
The trade agreements underpinning the treaty were supposed to be based on a free market and open borders. But, says Jordan's Trade and Industry Minister Ali Abu Raged, these have been undercut by a separate economic agreement Israel signed with Yasser Arafat's Palestinian National Authority (PNA), which imposes quotas on imports to the West Bank. The only product Jordan currently exports to the West Bank is cement which, due to Israel's security checks and levies at the border, has a cost of \$42 a bag in Amman but a sell price of \$75 by the time it reaches Gaza. The result is a trade imbalance in favour of Israel and the PNA, says Abu Raged.

All of this has been just to Jordan's opposition parties, not only the IAF but also the smaller Nasserite and leftist groups, who are adept at linking economic recession at home to peace with Israel abroad. The government's decision on 13 August — in line with IMF prescriptions — to remove subsidies on bread and animal feed was akin to tossing a match on dry tinder.

The fact that it was imposed against a

majority of deputies in Jordan's 80 member parliament merely highlighted the government's lack of legitimacy.

But the real danger to the king is that there is little either he or his government can do to alleviate the economic situation. On this front, as Fanek says, Jordan is dependent on "foreign players" such as the IMF, the US and Israel. For it is these powers — far more so than foreigners "educated in Iraq" — who will really determine Jordan's economic and political future.



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## The writing on the wall

Israel's strategy of increasing its territorial gains bodes ill for greater Palestinian control over the West Bank and Gaza, writes Khaled Sewelam

It is difficult to find anyone who strongly believes that the limited self-rule in effect in Gaza and Jericho will soon be expanded to include the entire West Bank. Most political analysts agree that neither Labour nor Likud are serious about making any substantial territorial concessions. What the former Labour government agreed to theoretically regarding the exchange of land for peace, did not conform with its practices on the ground.

Evidence supporting this view is found in the attitude of the Israeli Defence Force (IDF) toward security in the Occupied Territories and their subsequent construction of bypass roads in these areas. According to an *Israel Shahak* report, "The army does not want to share responsibility with the Palestinian police in anything and does not even want the latter to enforce order anywhere in the West Bank." The IDF contends that the Palestinian police are unable to guarantee the safety of Israelis passing through areas abandoned by their security forces.

Accordingly, by the end of 1994, the Israeli army had officially announced its plans to construct 400km of new roads in the West Bank, requiring an investment of \$330 million and reflecting Labour's determination to retain con-

trol of the area. According to the plan, Palestinian residents are not permitted to travel on these strategic routes. The construction of these 20 new roads required the

bypass roads has touched off popular Palestinian protests as well as complaints by Palestinian officials. Although it was agreed that the settlement issue would be postponed

Israeli Housing Minister Ben-Elizer has become expert at announcing new confiscations and projects for building Israeli homes in Palestinian areas. His tactics include setting up road blocks and limiting Palestinian activity there.

At the time Oslo was signed, Israel had already annexed approximately 70 per cent of the West Bank to be turned into state land for Jewish settlements. Of this 70 per cent, only 16 per cent had been allocated to Jewish settlers at the time of the Oslo Agreement. It has been suggested that removing some or even all of the remaining 54 per cent of state land to the Palestinian peasants was possible during the first 6-8 months following the agreement.

The same holds true for the Gaza Strip. The number of Jewish settlers there increased from 5,000 to 8,000 following Oslo, and no land was ever restored to Palestinians. Although Jewish settlements in the West Bank and Gaza Strip

create constant tension and conflict between Israelis and Palestinians, Labour officials of the previous government gave no indication that those settlements would be removed. Removal, or at least freezing, the settlements is necessary when considering that the annual rate of growth in the settler population is 9.8 per cent (reaching 127,000 during 1994), a growth rate three times higher than in any other region in Israel, according to Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics.

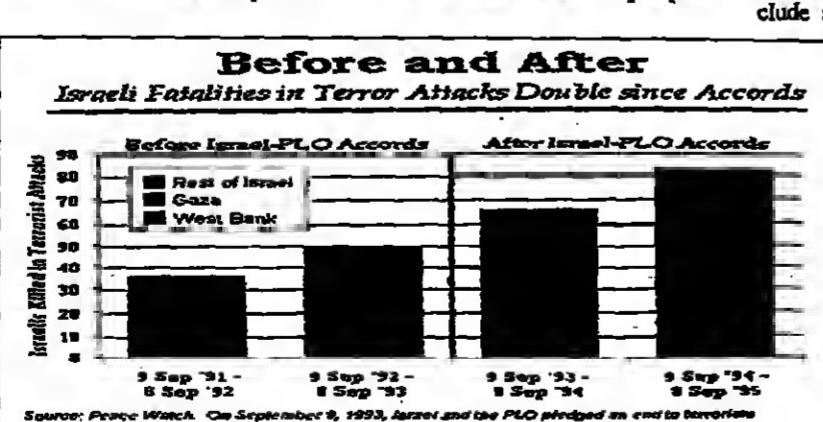
The Israeli population in the settlements surrounding Jerusalem comprises almost one-third of the West Bank settler population of 150,000. It was the intention of former Labour Prime Minister Shimon Peres to construct 13,000 units in the 1995-1998 period — concentrated in towns like Maale Adumim, Betar, Efrat, and Civat Ze'ev — providing housing for an additional 50,000 Israelis. The creation of the bypass roads has facilitated the expansion of settlements throughout this area.

Likewise, events currently taking place under the present Likud-led government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu reaffirm the intention of Israel to keep permanent control over the West Bank and Jerusalem. In Netanyahus view, Oslo II, which awarded the Palestinian Authority control of less than 30 per cent of the West Bank and close to 90 per cent of Gaza, marks the end of Israel's territorial concessions to the PNA, not the beginning.

The Israeli press recently reported that the first steps have been taken to establish a new Jewish settlement in Jerusalem. The Eastern Gate Project, if implemented, would lead to the confiscation of 800 acres of Palestinian land. Settlements specifically designed for expansion are those near Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. Israel's犹太人 will be encouraged to move to these areas during the next 15 years than Jerusalem, which, according to Israeli plans, is quickly running out of space for new Israeli and Palestinian housing.

Netanyahu made his intentions clear in his inauguration speech to the Knesset on 19 June 1996. "Zionism is not dead. We have a wonderful youth, willing to mobilise for national tasks. We will encourage this spirit; we will encourage pioneering settlements in the Land of Israel; in the Negev, Galilee, Judea and Samaria, and the Golan.

The settlers are the real pioneers of our day, and they deserve support and appreciation. But above all we will guard and strengthen Jerusalem, the eternal capital of the Jewish people, undivided under the sovereignty of the State of Israel."



to the final status negotiations, this was contingent on an agreement between both sides not to aggravate the situation. The land settlements are to build bypass roads and to subsequently expand the settlements. This is in direct opposition to this understanding.

The continuing construction of

كذا من الأصل

## Opposition fiasco in Mount Lebanon

The outcome of Mount Lebanon's elections was a major setback for Christian opposition leaders and Hizbullah, reports Zeina Khodr from Beirut

Lebanon's opposition suffered a severe blow in the first round of the country's five-phase parliamentary elections on Sunday. With a relatively high voter turnout, the ballot was marred by the death of a civilian, fist-fights and charges of voting irregularities.

The ballot was held in the Christian-dominated Mount Lebanon province where the contest between supporters and opponents of the Syrian-backed government was obvious. The election in this governorate were regarded as the most controversial and sensitive since opposition to Syrian influence in Lebanese affairs is strongest in Mount Lebanon. It is also in this region that the 1992 elected boycott, mainly by the minority Christian community — was the biggest.

But this time round many Christians ignored calls for a boycott from Christian opposition leaders in exile who are against the presence of Syrian troops in Lebanon and the recently ratified election law. The new legislation granted the Mount Lebanon Governorate exceptional status by dividing it into smaller districts. Voting in all other regions will be based on government constituencies in compliance with the constitution.

This year's ballot was described as a watershed for the Christians, who have been marginalised in politics for the past four years. Many rallied around prominent members of the Christian opposition who had decided to participate either as candidates or voters in order to regain their influence and power after realising that the boycott was not the best way to deal with the prevailing situation.

According to the Interior Ministry, an estimated half of Mount Lebanon's 656,000 eligible voters (nearly 70 per cent are Christians) cast their ballots.

Pro-government candidates won 32 out of 35 seats allotted to the

Mount Lebanon region in the 128-member, half-Christian, half-Muslim assembly. Twenty-five of the 35 deputies must be Christians. The five ministers who ran in the elections — Michel El-Murr, Walid Jumblatt, Marwan Hamadeh, House Speaker Nabih Berri's Amal movement and Prime Minister Rafik Al-Hariri and Fares Boueiz — won.

The results were a major setback for opposition leaders who wanted to win several seats in parliament. The most powerful opposition ticket ran in the North Metn district. But none of its seven candidates won except for deputy Nasib Lahoud, who was re-elected. The ticket leader, Albert Moukhaber, who heads the opposition in Lebanon, lost. The coalition was running against Minister Murr. Candidates from both camps exchanged accusations of fraud, bribery and intimidation.

According to the Lebanese Association for the Democracy of Elections (LADE), an independent observer group, the elections in North Metn were unacceptable. "If there is any law, the vote there should be annulled because of the amount of intimidation and corruption," the group charged. "Police were distributing election papers for pro-government candidates and officials were telling voters not to use curtained booths when voting. These abuses don't reflect tensions between the opposition and the authorities."

There were also fistfights and shooting in other areas. A supporter of Druze deputy Tala Arslan died at a polling station in Sfeiroun. Initial medical reports say he died of a stroke after a fist-fight with supporters of Minister Jumblatt. Arslan and Jumblatt are vying for leadership over the Druze community.

Another major outcome was Hizbullah's failure to win in Baabda district, an area which includes the capital's southern suburbs — a stronghold for the movement. Hizbullah deputy Ali Ammar was run-

ning on the Christian opposition ticket led by Pierre Daccache. Their main rivals were Minister Hobeika's ticket which was an alliance between his Waad Party, Jumblatt's Progressive Socialist Party, House Speaker Nabih Berri's Amal movement and Prime Minister Rafik Al-Hariri.

This was the first test for Hizbullah in this year's poll. It may have to re-examine its alliances in South Lebanon and the Bekaa if it wants to hold onto its eight seats in parliament. Hizbullah is very popular in the Bekaa where it is expected to keep its five seats. However, it may lose seats in the south if it fails to forge an alliance with the Amal movement.

Analysts say there is an effort to minimise Hizbullah's power. Both Berri and Jumblatt have repeatedly issued statements that the resistance in South Lebanon is for all the Lebanese and not just Hizbullah which spearheads the guerrilla war to drive Israeli troops out of the south and the west Bekaa.

The elections in Mount Lebanon were the first phase and will be followed over the next four Sundays with elections in the governorates of the north, Beirut, the south and Bekaa.

The results of the Mount Lebanon poll were a litmus test for the strength of the Christian opposition in the new parliament. They failed to win more than three parliamentary seats. And they only succeeded in breaking ranks with leaders in exile. This fragmented the opposition and divided the voters, a move that was not welcomed by the government.

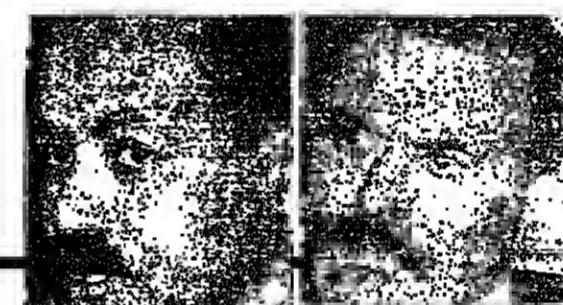
The outcome of next Sunday's ballot will clarify alliances and strategies in the other four governorates. And despite the hopes of the Christian opposition to regain power in the legislature, the new parliament is expected to look very similar to its predecessor.



A Lebanese policeman guards Christian women at a polling station in Mount Lebanon where pro-government candidates made sweeping gains (photo: Reuters)

## A preference for conflict

The kissing and making up of Yemeni and Eritrean officials in Paris has become a tedious game of charades for international public consumption. The truth of the matter is that not making up is the unwritten rule of the game, writes Gamal Nkrumah



### Weapons of 'excellent trust'

ISRAEL successfully tested an American-financed Arrow-2 anti-missile missile over the Mediterranean on Tuesday. Israeli officials said that the Arrow 2, which intercepted another missile at high altitude, will be ready for use by 1998.

Development of the Arrow was launched in the late 1980s and US funding was approved as part of the strategic defence initiative known as Star Wars.

"The Arrow programme is a joint US-Israeli effort to develop an interceptor missile for the Arrow weapons system. The information gained from the programme has potential application for several US missile defence programmes," said an Israeli Defence Ministry statement.

The Arrow 2 test was conducted a few hours after reports that Syria had tested a medium-range Scud-C missile capable of hitting targets anywhere in Israel were broadcast on Israeli television on Tuesday.

Since Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu came to power last June and indicated his unwillingness to withdraw from the Golan Heights, tension has been rising between Israel and Syria.

In a related development, Israeli Air force Chief General Eyal Ben Elihu said yesterday that Israel will shortly introduce modifications in its radar-alarm system allowing it to have direct and "real-time" access to information from US satellites in case of a missile attack.

Ben Elihu said that the new link-up is "proof of the excellent state of relations and trust between Israel and the US".

Meanwhile, experts from eight Arab countries met in Cairo this week to discuss Israel's nuclear capability. The special watchdog group, made up of experts from Egypt, Syria, Libya, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Jordan and the United Arab Emirates, was set up by the League in March. The experts will submit a report to the Arab League at the next ministerial meeting to be held on 14 September.

Arab countries want Israel to adhere to the Nuclear Non-proliferation treaty (NPT) and to place its nuclear installations under the direct control of the Vienna-based International Atomic Energy Authority (IAEA).

A game of bluff between Eritrea and Yemen over the disputed Hanish archipelago in the Red Sea has often occurred in the past few months. After months of procrastination, Eritrea and Yemen revived parley under French pressure only to be embroiled again in armed conflict over the islands last week. Under a French-brokered accord on 21 May 1996, the protagonists are obliged to settle the dispute between them by peaceful means. The tight-lipped response of officials on both sides is alarming. But it is obvious that Eritrea is exploiting new Franco-American differences and old Saudi-Yemeni feuds to secure its claim over the disputed Red Sea islands. Yemen is at a loss.

The Yemeni Charges d'Affaires in New York Hamed Obadi and his Eritrean counterpart Ghirmay Ghebremariam met with United Nations Secretary-General Boutros Ghali in New York last week. The diplomatic rumour mill has it that while in light of his quarrel with the United States, the good offices of France to the Americans. France jumped at the opportunity to play a more substantial role in African affairs after its rapprochement with the Americans and the neighbouring African states in the Rwandan and Burundian crisis. Rwanda and Burundi have traditionally been seen as falling within the French sphere of influence. Eritrea and Ethiopia have, since the fall of the Mengistu Haile Mariam regime in 1991, become decidedly pro-American. Notwithstanding its debacle in Somalia, Washington seems to have designs on influencing events in both Somalia and Sudan. France, therefore, has a vital interest in proving that it is still a power to be reckoned with. The UN secretary-general, too, has a big stake in the success of the French efforts.

The United States is stepping up its influence in the Horn of Africa. Somalia is closely watched. Sudanese opposition forces are regularly feted in America. Washington is keeping an eye on Eritrean and Ethiopian opposition forces based both in America and elsewhere. The Voice of America this month announced that it will begin broadcasting programmes in both the Tigrayan and Oromo languages as well as in the Amharic language. Oromo is the most widespread language spoken in Ethiopia even though Amharic is the country's official language. Tigrayan is widely spoken in northern Ethiopia and in Eritrea. The French are naturally miffed at America's attempts to widen its sphere of influence in Africa. France has the largest military base in the Horn of Africa. Its air and naval base in Djibouti is to date the key to securing Western interests in the area.

To France goes the credit for creating a formal negotiating forum where Eritrea and Yemen can discuss their differences. Ghali was the one who nominated the French to handle such a tricky task. In the rough and tumble world of African politics — especially Horn of Africa politics — the American sometimes seems naive and short-sighted as happened in Somalia. Ghali, in league with the French, saw an instant opportunity to prove their worth in the Yemen-Eritrean dispute.

Three areas of concern are raised by the latest fracas. The first is that regional and international powers are using the Hanish archipelago dispute between Yemen and Eritrea to settle old scores and to advance their own interests in the area. Sec-

ond, Afro-Arab solidarity appears to be in jeopardy: Yemen is Arab, Eritrea is African. Third, that economic and social development be put on the back-burner and the nascent democratisation process in the area be arrested as governments in the region take more authoritarian measures giving political tensions as an excuse. A rise in human rights violations might also follow. The removal on 9 May of the editor of *Eritrea Profile* ostensibly because he published an article criticising the running of one of Asmara's major hospitals is an ominous sign.

The Eritrean charges d'affaires told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that the Hanish archipelago is Eritrean and that the Yemenis illegally occupy Zugar. Eritreans are annoyed at Arab insinuations that the Israelis might be behind the Eritrean moves. Deputy head of the Eritrean Mission in Cairo, Fesseha Ghebreabeb, insisted that "it is an insult to us to suggest that we asked the Israelis to come to our aid. We liberated the entire territory of Eritrea single-handedly and we do not rely on Israel to liberate three of our 600 islands in the Red Sea," he explained. "We are confident that international arbitration will rule that the islands are Eritrean," he told the *Weekly*.

Eritrean President Afeworki visited Saudi Arabia last month and met Eritreans resident in the kingdom, many of whom belong to Islamist groups opposed to his regime. Nevertheless, Saudi Arabia is Eritrea's biggest aid donor and Saudi Arabia's relationship with Yemen is at best oscillating and at worst outright hostile. It seems that Eritrea is exploiting the questionable relationship between its Arab neighbours across the Red Sea to its ad-

vantage. The Eritrean authorities have in the past two months seized three Egyptian and two Yemeni fishing vessels. The fishermen have been deported and the ships confiscated. Eritrea conceded that a "minimal" number of troops remain on Hanish Al-Sughra. Samas demanded an immediate withdrawal of Eritrean troops from the Hanish archipelago. "The presence of the Eritrean troops is a threat to Red Sea security and to shipping lanes in the Bab Al-Mandab Strait," Abdul-Malek Said, the Yemeni chargé d'affaires in Cairo, told *the Weekly*.

According to the London-based Arabic daily *Al-Hayat*, Paris envoy François Guittet, who arrived in Asmara on 17 August, had a heated argument with Eritrean President Afeworki over the wording of the May accord which the Eritrean president wanted to change. The Eritrean Embassy in Egypt denied *Al-Hayat's* allegations. Choosing an independent foreign policy is not only critical for an impoverished Third World country's survival, but it also means a significant financial investment.

On gaining its independence Eritrea declined to become an Arab League member state like the Comoros, Djibouti and Somalia. Many Arab states could not come to terms with the existence of Eritrea as a non-Arab nation. Yemen and other Arab states double-crossed by the Eritrean revolutionaries they had helped and trusted before independence. "Eritrea must evacuate Hanish Al-Sughra Island immediately," Said told *the Weekly*. "Countries engaged in the mediation effort between the two countries, particularly France, must make an effort to see that Eritrea vacates the island," he added.

Libyan authorities deny reports of armed clashes with militant Islamic groups, adding to the confusion concerning the situation in Tripoli, reports Khaled Dawoud



## Tripoli denies unrest

Two previously unknown militant Islamic groups issued separate statements this week claiming the series of attacks against Libyan security officials, killing more than 20 people, including members of Libya's leader Muammar Gaddafi's family.

The Fighting Islamic Group (Al-Gama'a Al-Islamiya Al-Muqatila) claimed several separate attacks over the past month against top security officials. Another group, the Islamic Martyrs Movement (Harakat Al-Shuhada Al-Islamiya), said it carried out a failed attempt to assassinate Defence Minister Colonel Abu Bakr Yunis, a member of the Libyan Revolutionary Command Council.

Unconfirmed reports on clashes between Libyan security forces and militant Islamic groups have been reported off and on in the media since June last year. The Libyan authorities, while maintaining tight control on the local media, have never confirmed these reports.

More than a year ago, Libyan authorities reportedly expelled many foreign workers, predominantly Egyptian, Sudanese and other African nationals from central Libyan cities following clashes with militant groups. The Libyan authorities denied the clashes. They confirmed, however, their campaign against so-called illegal workers at a time

when the country was facing economic hardships due to the more than four-year-old United Nation's air embargo and limited economic sanctions.

A few months later, reports of clashes between security forces and Islamists shifted to Libya's second major city, Benghazi. Two Libyan soldiers were reportedly killed while standing in front of the Egyptian consulate there. The Libyan authorities subsequently denied these and similar incidents, saying the police had been chasing a gang of drug dealers in which gun fire was exchanged.

A Western diplomat in Tripoli, contacted by telephone from Cairo, told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that "the situation is very confusing. We only hear about these reports from Western news agencies, and there is no way to confirm whether clashes took place."

Travellers coming from Libya to Egypt through the border crossing in Salloum were the main source of recent reports on clashes between militants and security forces. Travellers were quoted as saying they saw Russian-made aircrafts from the Libyan army bombing rebels in the mountains. The Libyan authorities maintained that they were carrying out manoeuvres in the area. Libyan opposition elements in exile, mostly US-backed and funded, welcome any indication of the regime's instability, but have

another explanation for these accounts.

Spokesman for the National Front for the Salvation of Libya in Cairo, Mohamed Gibril, told the *Weekly* that clashes "did take place over the last year between security forces and young Libyans who are angry at the regime. But these youths are not necessarily Islamists."

Gibril claimed that the Libyan leadership was blaming Islamists for attacks against the regime. "It gain the sympathy of Western countries, specifically the US and Europe," Gibril suggests that Gaddafi is "playing on the sentiments of Western countries, who might consider a Muslim militant regime a worse prospect."

Gibril denied that a strong militant Islamic movement exists in Libya, "comparable to those in Algeria or Egypt." He claimed, however, that "anger regularly erupts against members of Gaddafi's intelligence who control the country and violate human rights."

The Western diplomat in Tripoli, expressed the belief that "despite continued reports of political unrest, we still believe that Colonel Gaddafi maintains a strong grip on power and that there is no real threat to his regime."

Libya has been living with an international air and

### PNA bans Said's books

TWO books critical of the Oslo Accords between Israel and the PLO, and authored by the renowned Palestinian American scholar Edward Said, have been confiscated from bookshops in the self-rule areas by Yasser Arafat's Palestinian National Authority (PNA), a report page in the London-based Arab daily *Aswad Al-Awsat* claimed yesterday.

The books, entitled *Gaza-Jericho: An American Peace and Oslo 2: Peace without Ground*, are collections of 24 articles written by Said during the two years between the Oslo I and Oslo II agreements. The articles were syndicated in English in a number of newspapers around the world, including *Al-Ahram Weekly*, and were published in Arabic by the London-based Arabic daily, *Al-Hayat*.

*Aswad Al-Awsat* based its report on a number of interviews with named bookshop owners in the West Bank as well as a senior PNA official who asked to remain anonymous.

Said, who is a professor of comparative literature at Columbia University, confirmed to *Aswad Al-Awsat*, via his assistant, that the reports were true.

# By cross and crescent

Religious fundamentalist groups stalk the nightmares of East African governments. Sectarian and tribal-based, these groups care more about manipulating social behaviour than about political participation in a democratic fashion, yet the calamity persists that they can bestow deliverance on deserved peoples.

As East African governments begin to institute democratisation and good governance policies, they come up against the influence of these messianic Islamist and Christian movements; their emergence in East African nations is creating so-called "folk devils" who can be blamed for ethnic conflicts, political chaos and social ills. Speculation now centres on who is behind this religious revival.

The fundamentalist groups have self-righteous and self-styled leaders who assert their dominance over their followers by institutionalising violence, drumming up ethnic chauvinism and foretelling dramatic upheavals in the near future. But the key to their success is that they have no bases that can be stormed, and, unlike Islamists groups in the Middle East, the East African groups have an unashamedly tribal — as opposed to national or regional — agenda. They address localised ethnic constituencies and hold sway in provincial backwaters.

With rumblings of coup attempts in Sudan, defections of Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) cadres to the Islamist-dominated government in Khartoum, the assault of Christian fundamentalist forces on Uganda's main northern city of Gulu, and the penetration of Ethiopian forces deep inside Somalia in pursuit of Islamists, the stage seems to be set for a series of wars waged by religious fundamentalist groups.

The unhappy chain of events seems to have been triggered off by Khartoum — at least that is what Sudan's neighbours believe. The issue was discussed by some 400 SPLA delegates at New Kush, in Eastern Equatoria province in southern Sudan, between 30 May and 3 April. It was a publicity coup for the SPLA, since the meeting took place deep inside Sudanese territory. Western observers were present, including the British minister for development and overseas assistance, Baroness Linda Chalker, former Sudanese foreign minister and top SPLA official, Mansour Khalid, told *Al-Ahram Weekly*.

**Human Rights**  
Watch/Africa recently issued a report, denouncing human rights violations in Sudan and particularly the slave trade there. Faiza Rady reviews its findings, and below, reviews a UN report on slavery world wide

The Ethiopian Defence Forces may be making a terrible mistake by pursuing the Islamist groups in politically chaotic Somalia. Al-Ittihad Al-Islami (Islamic Unity) militants operate in southeastern Somalia around the city of Baidoa and infiltrate into the neighbouring Ethiopian province of Ogaden, which borders Somalia and Kenya. Most Ogaden inhabitants are ethnic Somalis, and Al-Ittihad Al-Islami wants Ogaden to secede from Ethiopia and join Somalia. The Ethiopian government claims that Al-Ittihad Al-Islami is composed of mercenaries from neighbouring countries including Somalia, Sudan, Pakistan and several other Arab and Islamic countries. An Ethiopian government communiqué warned that the "sub-region of which Ethiopia is a part cannot be used as the headquarters of the multi-national terrorist group".

Al-Ittihad Al-Islami asserted that it had killed 150 Ethiopian troops and that 17 of its own combatants had also died in the conflict. The Ethiopian government then launched what it described as a "limited military counter-offensive" in hot pursuit of the group on 8-10 August. The prevailing situation in Somalia has been used by this terrorist group, composed of nationals of various countries from our region and from without, as a convenient opportunity as well as a cover to destabilise the whole region," the Ethiopian communiqué said. There is growing cooperation between the Ethiopian, Eritrean

and Ugandan governments, the Operation Liaison Committee headed by SPLA leader John Garang, and the Higher Military Committee headed by General Fathi Al-Saray — deputy president of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) and head of the Sudanese diplomatic mission in Asmara, which is staffed by opposition mem-

tars. Property was looted and vehicles belonging to the World Food Programme, the United Nations Refugee Agency and other aid agencies were destroyed.

The incident highlighted Sudan's continued interference in its neighbours' internal affairs. Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni accuses Sudan of using the LRA and another rebel Ugandan group, the West Nile Bank Front (WNBF), to put pressure on the Ugandan government.

But what is the LRA? The shadowy group has been operating in the northern third of Uganda for the past nine years. The LRA is led by Joseph Kony, a former Roman Catholic leader, who wants Uganda — and Africa — to be ruled strictly by the ten commandments. Eastern and southern Africa have witnessed the emergence of other such militant fundamentalist groups since the introduction of Christianity by European missionaries into the region in the 1870s. In 1986-87 the Holy Spirit group, led by one Alice Lakwena, attacked government installations and championed the cause of Nilotic peoples in northern and eastern Uganda. Over 5,000 people were killed as a result of the insurgency. Lakwena's cult organisation spawned many equally ruinous imitations in Uganda and beyond its borders — including the LRA.

Like Lakwena's Holy Spirit movement, the LRA takes its inspiration from different periods of Uganda's history — pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial. It ap-

pears to aim at a synthesis of past and present — just like the ideology espoused by the National Islamic Front (NIF) which holds sway in Khartoum.

The LRA is especially active in the Gulu district populated by ethnic Acholi, the largest of the Nilotic northern Ugandan ethnic groups. Observers believe that the LRA's insurgency hints at prevalent Acholi disengagement. Northern Uganda has been in a state of low intensity warfare for some time — the war in southern Sudan has traditionally tended to spill over into the region. Some northern Ugandans are disgruntled with the Museveni regime, dominated by the southern Bantu ethnic groups. There is a feeling that northern Ugandans, who belong to the main Nilotic ethnic groups with close tribal affiliations to the Nilotic ethnic groups of southern Sudan, are marginalised in the decision-making process. Many believe that their peripheralisation is a policy cornerstone of the ruling NRM, a charge that Museveni refutes.

The contrast between Uganda and its Sudanese neighbour is great. The UN Economic and Social Council, the UN Commission on Human Rights and Amnesty International have all issued statements condemning the Khartoum regime which is fighting a war that has resulted in the death of an estimated 1.5 million Sudanese, the displacement of some five million southern Sudanese and contributed to declining living standards and deteriorating living conditions. Sudan's overall infant mortality rate of 150 per 1,000 is now among the world's highest.

Uganda, on the other hand, has been enjoying one of the highest economic growth rates in Africa — 7 per cent per annum. Northern Uganda has not benefited as much from the economic boom, however, although northerners not only formed the bulk of Uganda's army at independence and up until the National Resistance Army (NRA) swept to power in 1987, but also

retained control over the political institutions in the East African nation until that date. Moreover, almost all the presidents of Uganda, including the first president Milton Obote and the second, Idi Amin, have been northerners.

Obote, who was first ousted in 1971, was reinstated after winning a presidential election in 1980, before being overthrown again in a military coup in 1985. His demise led to what some anti-NRA politicians hoped would be a permanent rupture of relations between northerners and southerners in Uganda. The LRA emerged as a northern protest group and a tribal ideology with religious overtones.

Former President Idi Amin Dada has been in exile in Saudi Arabia since 1979 when the now defunct Uganda National Liberation Army (UNLA) with the support of regular Tanzanian troops stormed Kampala in April 1979. Aminfina fled to Libya before finally settling in Jeddah. There are reports of both Libyan and Gulf Arab funds filling the coffers of several East African Islamist groups.

Ugandan Defence Minister Amama Mbabazi also issued a statement in Kampala saying that the LRA was responsible for the indiscriminate killings of innocent and unarmed refugees and that it is aided and abetted by Khartoum. "The Ugandan government unreservedly condemns these acts of barbarism. These bandits who kill Ugandan civilians have now turned on refugees whom they are killing on behalf of the Sudanese government," Amama's statement said.

"It is clear that the LRA were executing a mission on behalf of the Sudanese government which in the recent past has stepped up its support for the LRA in northern Uganda, with particular emphasis on disorganising and putting into disarray refugee camps inside Uganda," the statement added. In similar vein, the Ethiopians rather more covertly warned that Sudan and its agents must pay for their dangerous military escapades and political intrigue. "The leaders of the multi-ethnic terrorist group Al-Ittihad Al-Islami and those behind them [the Sudanese authorities] should not assume that Ethiopia's known commitment to the scrupulous respect of international borders would deter it from taking appropriate action against those who seek to spread terror within the sub-region."



A Sudanese teenager contemplates life under the Islamist regime. Will Khartoum's brand of Islamism sweep through East Africa?

## 'Behind the red lines'

In a recent speech, Sudanese President Omar Al-Bashir described the limits to political participation under the state of emergency which he has imposed on the country since his June 1989 coup overthrew the democratically elected government of Sadiq Al-Mahdi. "When we talk of handing power to the people," said Bashir, "we mean the people will be [empowered] within certain limits, but no one will cross the red lines which are aimed at [protecting] the interest of the nation." Commenting on Bashir's definition of the "Sudanese people's power" undermined by the conveniently nebulous and elastic definition of "national interests", a June 1996 report published by Human Rights Watch/Africa (HRWA) wrote: "This anomalous situation, under Bashir and his fundamentalist National Islamic Front (NIF) party, provides no effective protection for human rights."

Although all Sudanese suffer from the suspension and systematic violation of their political and civil rights, southerners suffer the most, reported HRWA. Since 1955, the ongoing civil war has divided the country — with the exception of an 11-year period from 1972-83, when then President Ja'far Numeiry granted the South limited self-rule. Under the umbrella of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) and its military wing, the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) led by John Garang, the rebels have gained control of a large part of the South — a territory about three times the size of neighbouring Uganda. Although the SPLM has been demanding the creation of a "united, secular Sudan" since 1983, the Bashir administration's extremism has led many factions within the movement to favour independence.

The war in the South caused increasing civilian hardship in 1995, reported HRWA. The United Nations warned that intensified fighting in three areas of the South, namely Bahr Al-Ghazal, Jonglei and Upper Nile, had disrupted agricultural production and the people's precariously maintained food security. Operation Lifeline Sudan director Philip O'Brien said, "In parts of Bahr Al-Ghazal, mids destroyed up to three-quarters of people's grain stores, and in the Sobat region [of Upper Nile], fighting forced people away from their traditional grazing and fishing grounds." Consequently, an additional one million southerners received emergency food relief in 1995, bringing the total number of aid recipients to 2.1 million people.

In its ideological discourse, the government often presents the war as being determined by religion; the

south has to be "brought to the light" is an often quoted idiom. Victory would signify the southerners' conversion to Islam and the abandonment of "heathen" cultures and religions. In a recent radio broadcast, Bashir said that the spirit of *jihad* had taken over the people of Sudan and that entire sectors of the society were currently competing with each other — in defence of the faith and the homeland.

The conflict can easily be misinterpreted as a religious-ethnic struggle because northern Sudanese are mostly Arabic-speaking Muslims, while southerners are either Christians or animists who practise traditional African religions. Beyond its religious diversity, Sudan is also one of the most ethnically diverse countries in the world. According to a 1956 census — the only one which accounted for ethnic affiliation — the Sudanese are divided into 19 major ethnic groups and 597 sub-groups, and speak a total of 113 tribal languages.

The religious-ethnic divide masks, however, a more complex reality, explained HRWA. The Arab Muslim North has historically controlled the political and economic power base, while the South has largely remained poor and underdeveloped — although the region is rich in natural resources such as oil, water and fertile land. These resources became increasingly important to the government as the local agricultural economy was liberalised and incorporated into the market economy. While the north

became dependent on the international market's demand fluctuations and the state's foreign currency reserves, southern Sudan remained an autonomous, self-sufficient agrarian enclave.

In a recent radio broadcast, Bashir said that the spirit of *jihad* had taken over the people of Sudan and that entire sectors of the society were currently competing with each other — in defence of the faith and the homeland.

Setting to work against any potential opposition as soon as they usurped political power in June 1989, Bashir and his junta declared a state of emergency, suspending the constitution and the rule of law. When civilian judges protested illegal judiciary appointments and the harsh sentences delivered by the newly established military courts, the government fired 57 judges, including five supreme court justices.

The National Security Act was also used to clamp down on the September '95 student protests against the six-year-long suspension of all civil and political rights, and the untenable material conditions resulting from the regime's ill-fated economic liberalisation programmes: the per capita annual gross national product of \$420 is one of the lowest in Africa. Hundreds of student leaders were jailed and detained until March of the following year. Incarcerated in notorious "ghost houses" — where undocumented prisoners are held

inches, putting nine million people at the risk of starvation.

In an effort to further expedite detention procedures, the regime decreed the National Security Act of 1995, which provides for arbitrary detention in security cases for up to six months without charges and judicial review. The new law was promptly enforced in May of that year to facilitate the detention of former prime minister and leader of the banned Umma Party, Sadiq Al-Mahdi, who had dared to criticise the government. When other Umma Party leaders pressed the government to release him, 200 of them were in turn arrested and jailed for several months. They were quietly released in late August, on the eve of a visit by the European Parliament's Committee on African, Caribbean and Pacific States, which came to evaluate whether the European Union should resume financial backing of Sudan under the terms of the Lome Convention.

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secretly and remain incommunicado — many of them were severely beaten and tortured. An unknown number of street children who participated in the demonstrations were detained with the students.

Stifling and suppressing the opposition has become one of the principal jobs of the Bashir administration, which has devised ingenious surveillance and control strategies. The Population Index, for one, keeps a comprehensive and minute record on the whereabouts, activities and political tendencies of the capital's entire population. Parallel to the regular security forces, the junta has created NIF civil militias and vigilante groups to police and intimidate the people. Both shanty towns and Khartoum's most affluent neighbourhoods are daily patrolled by armed civilian thugs, who terrorise and sometimes even murder residents by imposing their own gang-style law. A case among many: on 24 March 1995, in block number seven of the capital's Riadat residential area, the neighbourhood NIF militia shot at a crowd of angry southern citizens, who were protesting the injury of a southerner by a local police officer.

Says Mohammed Kwai, a refugee and mother of two, was instantly killed. When investigating the murder, the police did not find it necessary to interrogate militia members. No charges were filed.

Beyond terrorising the population, suppressing the rule of law, detaining the opposition and institutionalising torture, the Bashir regime has uniquely distinguished itself by triggering the revival of slavery.

Attempting to fuel tribal rivalry in the South and weaken the powerful Dinka tribe, which is strongly represented in the SPLM-SPLA, the Bashir government has financed and supported Dinka's traditional regional rivals, the Baggaras, even incorporating Baggaras militiamen into the NIF's Popular Defence Forces. Under the authority and supervision of the army, Baggaras militiamen have raided Dinka settlements, capturing and enslaving women and children. "The evidence of this comes from international non-governmental organisations and journalists travelling to sites where slaves had recently been taken.

Interviewing escaped slaves elsewhere and even filming the exchange of money for slaves," wrote HRWA. British television broadcast a documentary on the subject in November 1995. Despite the overwhelming evidence, the regime has gagged all attempts to denounce the revival of the modern slave trade. Thus, in Bashir's Sudan, slavery, like all other human rights violations, remains buried behind the "red lines", concluded HRWA.

The United Nations Security Council voted late last week to impose an air embargo on Sudan. The embargo, scheduled to begin in three months time, is an attempt to pressure Khartoum into complying with the three Egyptians involved in the assassination attempt on Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak in Addis Ababa in June 1995. Instead of exacting any compliance with the decision, the Sudanese government complained that the sanctions were unfair as Sudan is not housing the wanted Egyptians. The government has been denying any knowledge of their whereabouts since the suspects. Sudan has asked the Security Council to reconsider its decision to impose an air embargo, describing it as an "infingement of the principles of justice and objectivity."

Sudan's Foreign Minister Ali Osman Taha stressed that the diplomatic sanctions imposed last May combined with the new embargo would have a disastrous effect on the economy and stability of the state. He emphasised that whose economy and security would also be affected. He accused Egypt of turning to international organisations rather than engaging in bilateral talks between the two nations. "We have been surprised by Egypt's insistence on agreement to launch a dialogue on bilateral cooperation," he said. Taha was held between President Mubarak and Sudanese President Omar Hassan in Cairo last June. Mubarak declared last month, however, that discussions problems between the two countries.

The spokesman for the Sudanese Embassy in Cairo, Abdel-Aziz Awad, refused official comment on the imposition of the embargo or the alleged Egyptian role in imposing that embargo. He said, "May God be with our poor country and punish those who worked to impose the embargo on Sudan."

Sudanese opposition groups in Cairo were optimistic that the air embargo would help shake the ruling regime without causing much harm to the Sudanese people. The spokesman of the Democratic Unionist party (DUP), Mohamed Al-Motasseem Hakeem, not having extensive negative effects on the people because the government has already banned travel abroad, furthermore, people are so poor they cannot afford the price of an air ticket. "For instance, the price of a return ticket to Cairo is \$30,000 Sudanese pounds, while the average annual income is only \$1,000," he said. Regarding the embargo's effect on the government, Hakeem said it will impose restrictions on government officials travelling outside Sudan and on journalists travelling to and from Sudan. He praised the timing of the air embargo, stating that it came while the government was busy dealing with riots in Khartoum and Omdurman over the difficult living conditions in those areas. "The riots show that people are rejecting the government because it is not offering them a dignified standard of living," he added.

Masnoon Sherif, of the Umma Party, believes that the Khartoum government's reaction to the air embargo is proof of their lack of respect for the international community and the UN. He told the *Weekly* that any sanctions, however grave they may be, will not increase or reduce the suffering of the Sudanese civilians. "It has reached unimaginable boundaries in all areas anyway." But he said, "it is obvious that the air embargo will have a considerable effect on the government." Sanctions or embargoes are expected to affect the important fields of the country, namely economy and trade, and it is the ruling elite, not the people, who are controlling these fields in Sudan," he said. He expressed his hope that the air embargo would prevail on the government to hand over the three Egyptians involved in President Mubarak's assassination attempt. At the same time he hopes it will end the government's stranglehold on terrorism and contribute to improving the standard of living of the Sudanese people.

In an interview with the *Weekly*, Abdou Agwa, the representative of the southern parties of the DUP, described the air embargo as "fair" because it is punishing a regime that is violating international laws and oppressing its people. He said that the air embargo will not increase the feelings of isolation from which the people in Sudan are suffering. Nor will it affect their fears that the world regards them as a terrorist nation. The embargo will, however, weaken the regime and encourage the Sudanese people and opposition groups to rebel. Agwa added that the embargo could have been more effective had the grace period been less than three months. "Although I am sure that Sudan will not hand over the three Egyptians, I am not sure that nothing will happen in the three months to impede or delay the implementation of the air embargo." However, Agwa added, all we can do now is "keep our fingers crossed and wait."

The Security Council resolution, passed last Friday, did not set a specific date for the implementation of the embargo, but said that the Council would give Sudan a three-month grace period to hand over the three Egyptians. Diplomatic sanctions have been in effect since last May when the Sudanese government first refused to hand over the three wanted Egyptians.

## Born free

ALTHOUGH slavery has been officially abolished worldwide, a newly released United Nations report reveals that millions of people are still deprived of freedom — that most basic and essential human right — and live in conditions of slavery or near slavery. Based on thorough and lengthy investigations by paralegal organisations and human rights organisations in some 20 countries, the report documents how increasing political instability — as in Sudan — together with poverty, have created and maintained a thriving market for the sale of human beings, especially women and children. In Nepal, the report says, the agricultural labour system has been responsible for the enslavement of whole families for generations. Under this system, farm labourers can be bought and sold, and then handed down from father to son.

And in Burma, slavery has been institutionalised over the past four years through a forced labour system, where the authorities force both prisoners and civilians to work on infrastructure projects. Many such cases have been reported from areas where foreign companies have been prospecting for oil and natural gas and financing tourist projects.

Up to 50 million cases of illegal child slave labour have been documented in India. According to the report, Indian law provides no real support to bonded labourers because it demands that the slave provides evidence of his status to the court — a near impossible requirement for illiterate workers, particularly children, putting nine million people at the risk of starvation.

The report also defines the status of immigrant domestic workers in many countries as that of slave. Immigrant women, working as maids, often find themselves victims of physical and sexual abuse, denial of payment for months at a time, and forced confinement through the confiscation of travel and identity documents. Such immigrants do not usually have residence or work permits and are, therefore, kept in a state of total dependence on their employers. According to official statistics quoted in the report, there are 690,000 immigrant domestic employees in France and 600,000 in Spain.

But abuse is perhaps at its most blatant in the booming worldwide child sex market. The report describes a highly profitable prostitution network involving seven- and eight-year-old children in Brazil, and the documentation of half a million juvenile prostitutes operating on the streets of Sao Paulo.

مكتبة من الأصل

# The dream evaporates

The latest round of vicious fighting, flaring in Iraqi Kurdistan since mid-August, could well prove to be much more than just a second round in a bloody war between the two major Kurdish parties, the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) led by Masoud Al-Barzani, and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) led by Jalal Al-Talibani. And one of the main casualties of the current round of fighting is likely to be the age-old dream of Iraqi Kurds to gain recognised federal status within Iraq, a dream that, ever since the first round of fighting in May 1994, has been withering.

As always, the warring parties blame each other for beginning the fighting. PUK claimed last week that its rival, KDP, had amassed thousands of troops around the Kurdish capital, Arbil (Howler in Kurdish) in an effort to wrest the city from PUK control, established in January 1993. In a clear attempt at point scoring, PUK went on to accuse the KDP of coordinating its attacks with the Iraqi government which, it claimed, had advanced troops towards the PUK zone.

Predictably, the KDP responded by alleging that the fighting was initiated by the PUK, with the added twist that PUK was in cahoots with foreign powers, a none-too subtle reference to Iran. The seriousness of these accusations goes beyond the familiar exchange of propaganda aimed at discrediting the enemy. The present fighting is taking place close to the Iranian border, in the north eastern parts of Iraq. Moreover, the fighting comes less than two weeks after an unprecedented incursion of Iranian troops some 60km inside Iraqi territory, accomplished with the help of the PUK.

Whatever the truth is, one thing seems clear: the precarious truce which has survived for more than one year now, and resulted in a de facto partitioning of Iraqi Kurdistan into two separate principalities, has come to an end. The outcome of the present volatile situation hinges upon countless factors, many beyond the control of Iraq's Kurds. The coming months may well decide the future of Kurdistan, perhaps, even, of Iraq.

**BLACK SEPTEMBER?** The mandate of the Kurdish Parliament — the first parliament ever to be elected in Kurdish history, which began functioning in 1992 — comes to an end in September. Its term was initially set for three years, though from the outset it was clear that it would never function independently given that the seats were equally divided between the two major parties. In the wake of the elections, accusations of fraud and election rigging were heard from all quarters, and both Talibani and Barzani confessed privately that a fifty-fifty deal had been strongly supported by the American administration. Washington hoped that such an outcome would be a means to preserve some social peace among the major contenders for power. The end result, as is clear now, far from fulfilled those hopes.

Apart from a few ministerial posts given to the Islamists and the communists, the cabinet that was formed following the elections was split straight down the middle. The rule was that a minister fits one of the two big parties would appoint his deputy from the other party. On the face of it, this was a sensible formula, but with the deterioration and the rising tensions in relations between the two parties, it led to a total paralysis of both the cabinet and parliament.

The crisis began in 1994 when the PUK refused to hand over to the government custom's revenues from Ibrahim Al-Khalil border post between Turkey and Iraq. These revenues, estimated at US \$35 million annually, constitute the main, perhaps the only, financial resource of the Kurdish government and the area from which the tax is collected is a KDP stronghold. The KDP argued that it was withholding the funds in response to the "disappearance" of some \$19 million from the coffers of the Central Bank of Kurdistan, directed by PUK officials.

Sporadic outbursts of fighting and a major clash lasting from May 1994 to July 1995 ended up with Barzani's party in control of one third of the territory and population of Iraqi Kurdistan and the PUK in control of the rest. Significantly, the most developed parts of the country, including Arbil and Sulaymaniyah in the western part of Kurdistan, are under PUK control while Barzani is left with only Dohuk and the less-developed western part.

International, regional and local mediators have temporarily convinced both parties that given the balance of power between the two parties, and the horrors already inflicted on the Kurdish population, they should search for a negotiated settlement, the first step being to authorise parliamentary delegates to vote for an exceptional amendment prolonging the parliamentary term until September 1996.

In the 18 months since Talibani assumed control of Arbil each party has consolidated its power in its zone of influence, cleansing it of those suspected of sympathising with the other party, erecting border lines and checkpoints on the "borders", and establishing custom points. It is in such circumstances that the notorious Parastin and Zaynari, the security and intelligence apparatuses of the KDP and the PUK respectively, have gained the upper hand in their respective zones, each maintaining prisons, interrogation and torture centres.

Although the Kurds have not yet reached the reign of terror to which their Arab brethren are subject under Saddam Hussein, the grip of the intelligence organisations has become increasingly tight.

**WHAT WILL HAPPEN** after the truce is over in September? I asked the leaders of both parties. After out the blatan propaganda and the apportioning of blame, and their answers are startlingly similar, certainly when it comes to the role that the West, and the US administration in particular, should play in forcing an agreement. No Western power, though, seems interested in intervening at this stage.

A prominent figure within the PUK, who spoke on condition of anonymity, was quite frank in stating his party's plans.

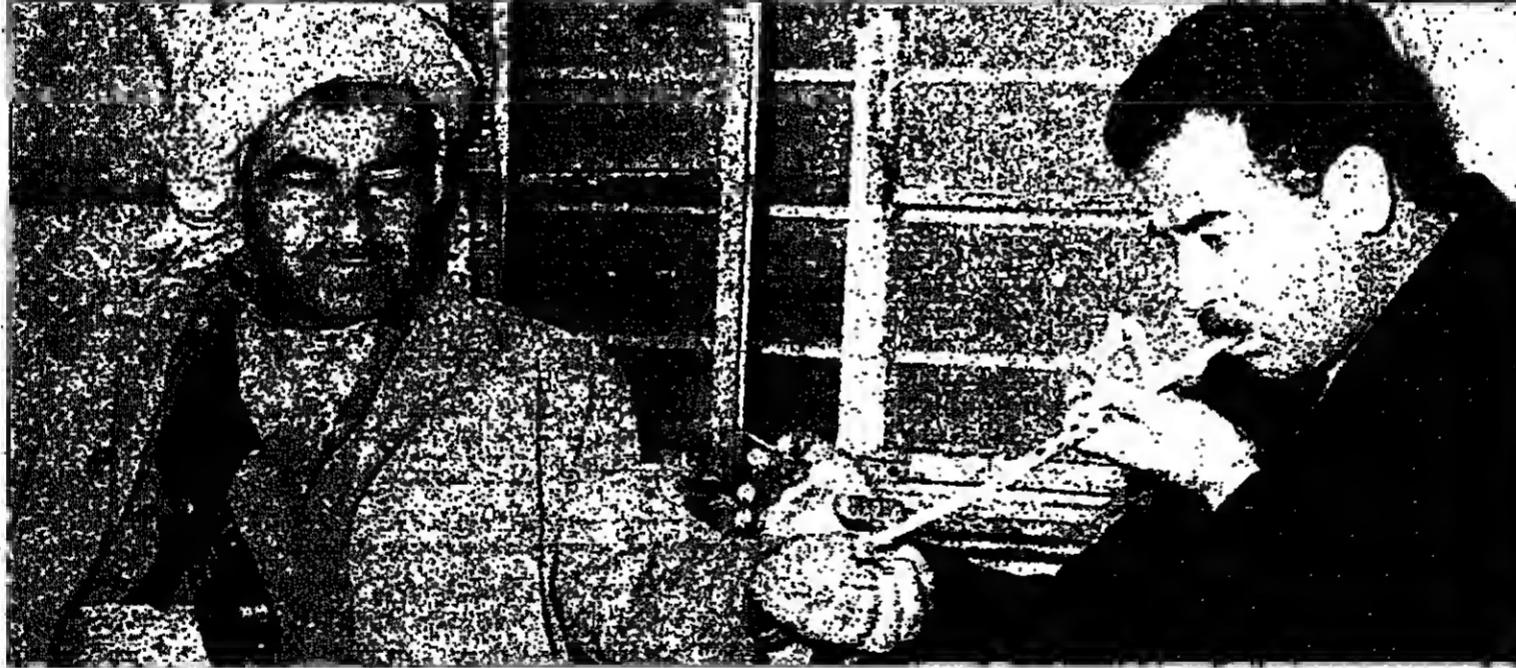
**Isam Al-Khafaji**, writing from Arbil, the capital of Iraqi Kurdistan, assesses the future for a people who after a 50 year long battle for self-determination appear as far as ever from the goal



May 1992 and optimism rules: Jalal Al-Talibani, left, and Masoud Al-Barzani emerge from a meeting aimed at ensuring a fair poll



May 1991: the Spanish Army Hospital set up in northern Iraq as part of Operation Safe Haven and right, Kurdish refugees in Islamabad, five years later



Times past: March 1970, and Mustafa Al-Barzani meets with Saddam Hussein, then deputy chairman of the Iraqi Revolution Council

**Masoud Al-Barzani**, the main recipient of Iraqi arms throughout the last year, constantly reminds his audience that it was Saddam Hussein who ordered the massacre of some 8,000 members of the Barzani clan in the mid-1980s, and that it was the Iraqi army that raped thousands of Barzani women, many of whom now work as prostitutes in Kurdistan

We are not going to wait indefinitely. Mediation efforts have led to nothing. Parliament is not functioning, and we are not going to prolong its mandate. If the other party wants to preserve the status quo, we won't. Our people must see a functioning administration and a functioning parliament.

Does that imply holding elections in your region and forming a formally separated zone?

The partition is a fact. We should not be blamed for that. As for the rest let's wait and see."

Juni (Mohamed Mahmoud Abdel-Raman), the KDP's number two, said: "We do not think that a solution can be reached by force. Although we will not recognise the de facto partitioning of Kurdistan, we will still struggle to reach a peaceful solution."

If what the other party, seeing that it controls two thirds of Kurdistan, held parliamentary elections in its region and established a government?

"We will not let our capital, Arbil, be used as a card to blackmail us. If the worst comes, then we will call upon the Kurdish people to fight any faction that dares to betray our nation and partition it."

"All to battle, then?"

"The people will decide what to do."

Although officials from both parties are keen to promote an image of confidence, during the past few months they have appeared increasingly jittery. Early in 1996 PUK troops ambushed a motorcade carrying leaders of the Labour Party for the Independence of Kurdistan, a small party financially dependent on the PUK but suspected of knifing relations with its rival.

Last June the KDP attacked the village of Kain, massacring a prominent chief

of the Sorchi tribe and plundering the houses of the village because the KDP had earlier intercepted wireless calls from the Sorchi Agha (sheikh) to PUK headquarters.

Aware of the risks of open warfare, both parties have been jockeying for position prior to September. Intimidating opponents, neutralising others, and buying partisans have become normal practices in Iraqi Kurdistan.

**ARM TWISTING:** The PUK complains that, although it controls the most important parts of Iraqi Kurdistan, it is the KDP that is in a better geographic and economic position, controlling the borders with Syria and Turkey while the only external outlet for the PUK is via Iran.

Turkey is the only country which officially trades with Iraqi Kurdistan, and through it with the rest of Iraq. This trade generates around \$35 million for the KDP. PUK's revenues, gained from smuggling to Iran, are trivial, it insists, when compared to KDP income.

Since the de facto partitioning of Kurdistan each faction has sought to maximise its income. Internal borders — i.e. those separating the KDP region from those of the PUK — are patrolled by new customs authorities that have been established on both sides. Theoretically, the KDP could strangle its rival, but both sides appear content to levy their own import and export duties. The result is soaring prices, compounding the distress of ordinary Kurds.

Last week a senior economic adviser to Jalal Al-Talibani, a wealthy Kurdish merchant and businessman, told me that the limited trade outlets of the Talibani region reduced the room for manoeuvre. The only options it had were either to launch a full scale war against its rival, or else to attack

the small KDP pocket bordering Iran which, once eliminated, would give PUK a monopoly on Iranian trade. Is it a coincidence, then, that this is precisely where the present round of fighting is taking place?

**BLOODY NEIGHBOURS:** Iraqi Kurdistan's neighbours have never disguised their interest in capitalising on the region's vulnerability. Turkish incursions inside Kurdistan have become routine, the excuse for which is provided by the Turkish Kurdish Workers' Party (PKK), which is accused of using Iraqi Kurdistan as a base to launch military attacks against the Turks. Such incursions have forced the KDP's to swallow its pan-Kurdish slogans. Having settled PKK members and their families in three camps near Posher, a KDP controlled area far away from the Turkish border, it has pledged to forbid any anti-Turkish operations in its territory.

Iran, seeking to strengthen its strategic and ideological zones of influence, has relied mainly on the Kurdish Islamic parties which, along with Saudi Arabia, it created and supported. Thus Kurdistan, whose modern history is distinguished by the absence of Islamist parties, now has two, the Islamic Union (Yaqiro Islami), which is an offshoot of the Moslem Brothers, and the Islamic Movement in Kurdistan, a Hezbollah styled militant party.

Iran's role, though, has gone much beyond support for such parties. For unlike Turkey, which has always been hostile to Kurdish movements and which only had to begin dealing with Iraqi Kurds since the end of the Gulf War, Iran has been using the Iraqi Kurdish card to gain regional influence ever since the days of

the Shah. During the past few years Iran's strategy has been in play one party against the other, and then enter later as a mediator between the two. The most recent twist in Iranian involvement, though, is PUK's collaboration with its neighbours. Iranian soldiers marched openly through the PUK controlled area and attacked a Kurdish Iranian Party base, supposedly protected by the PUK itself, near Koi Sanjaq, a town lying 60km from the Iranian border.

Iran claimed its actions were in retaliation against an earlier attack by the Iranian KDP launched from Iraqi territory. The PUK distributed an internal circular to its members, claiming that it had been taken by surprise, and could do nothing to prevent the attack on the group which, up until then, had been one of its closest allies.

The circular added that after the alleged Iranian KDP attack, the Iranians closed the borders with the Talibani controlled region, a move which, according to the circular, cost the PUK some \$2.2 million in less than a month.

These PUK claims played into the hands of the KDP, which, on the basis of its rivals own figures, was able to show that the PUK gained as much revenue from trade with Iran as KDP did with Turkey. In any future negotiations both parties will be keen to examine the accounts of the other.

The political costs of the Iranian adventure, though, look set to outweigh the financial loss the party claims it had incurred. Witnesses told me that three hours before the Iranian attack the PUK authorities turned off the electricity supply in an area extending from Koi Sanjaq to Arbil, causing a blackout that lasted from 10pm until 8am the following morning. In addition,

the PUK check points in the region were removed. It seems, however, that the Iranians did not quite trust their Iraqi allies. It is reported that prior to the operation 150 PUK senior cadres had been taken on hostage by the Iranians and moved to Marwan inside Iran.

Two days after the withdrawal of the Iranians from Iraq, some 2,000 Kurds demonstrated in the streets of Sulaymaniyah, a traditional stronghold of the PUK, denouncing the Iranian invasion and "those who facilitated it". Despite some harassment from the Zaynari Women's Federation organised a petition denouncing the invasion. Four thousand signatures were collected in three days.

**WHAT ABOUT BAGHDAD?** Since the beginning of the civil war in Kurdistan in 1994 both parties have regularly accused the other of accepting help from Saddam Hussein. New brands of heavy weapons have appeared in the area and it is almost certain that Baghdad has been arming both parties with the means to perpetuate their mutual killings. It is an open secret that this is what is taking place. Privately this is admitted. Equally privately, it is suggested that there is nothing wrong in exploiting Saddam Hussein's designs in further their own.

Masoud Al-Barzani, the main recipient of Iraqi arms throughout the last year, constantly reminds his audience that it was Saddam Hussein who ordered the massacre of some 8,000 members of the Barzani clan in the mid-1980s, and that it was the Iraqi army that raped thousands of Barzani women, many of whom now work as prostitutes in Kurdistan. Yet, he goes on, "though I am trying to make use of his move, this is far from pardoning him or his regime".

Such a rationale reflects the way Kurdish politicians think and feel about their neighbours, all of whom, at some time or another in their long struggle for recognition, have betrayed the Kurds. Barzani, the son of the legendary Mulla Mustafa, points to his turban, symbol of Barzani honour, and says: "This has been disdained by the Iranians too". Throughout the 1980s, when the partisan movement against Saddam Hussein had no outlet but Iran, Masoud Al-Barzani, accustomed to dealing with highly placed politicians, had to deal with the Iranians through a contact officer from the *Int'l* at, the intelligence office of the Islamic Republic.

Neither does the West escape from accusations of being hostile to the Kurdish cause. Despite such cosmetic gestures as renaming Ain Kawa Square in Arbil after Francois Mitterrand, anti-Western sentiments are running high among many Kurds of different allegiances. This change in mood contrasts sharply with that which prevailed soon after the launching of Operation Provide Comfort in 1991. Then photographs of President Bush adorned the windscreens of KDP and PUK jeeps. And the majority of coffee shops, restaurants and hotels in Kurdistan used to hang a poster showing a blond young woman dressed in *peri meya* (Persian) clothes, carrying a Kalashnikov. No one could say who the woman was, but everyone swore she was an American who fought "with us".

There are no pictures of American presidents or blonde soldiers now. Ordinary Kurds tell you simply that if the West cared they would force a settlement on both Kurdish parties. The more sophisticated place their argument within the context of US policy towards Iraq.

"The Americans are preparing for the post-Saddam era. They know that whoever comes will be too weak to force a peaceful marriage between Arabs and a united Iraqi Kurdistan. A divided Kurdish front would enable the new ruler to deal with the Kurdish question more easily".

This cynical explanation, with varying emphasis, is what I heard from ministers of both parties, intellectuals and leftists.

**GONE WITH THE WIND?** Unlike the euphoria over a positive American role in 1991, the majority of Kurds are now despondent. Wherever you go the question asked is the same: Will both parties accept the de facto partitioning by September and proceed to establish their own statelets accordingly? Will Masoud Al-Barzani accept being restricted to a smaller, though relatively more prosperous, portion of Kurdistan?

While Badinan, the western part of Kurdistan falling under Masoud's rule, fully sympathises with the KDP, the same cannot be said about the more sophisticated and less tribal Suran. Arbil appears to sympathise with the KDP, the communists and the PUK in that order. Sulaymaniyah is overwhelmingly pro PUK. The Islamists have been making net gains, thanks to widespread disappointment with the two major parties, and to the generous pay the Islamists offer to recruits.

A cadre in both major parties receives a monthly salary of 1D (Iraqi dinars) 700, in addition to some allowances covering rent, family and transport costs. All in all this amounts to some \$60 (the exchange rate of the Iraqi dinar against the dollar is 50 times higher in Kurdistan than that in the rest of Iraq, one more paradox of a country like Iraq).

The Islamic movement pays its cadres \$100 in addition to allowances. Moreover, the Islamists have benefited from the collapse of central welfare provision, establishing their own schools and health centres, orphanages and women's workshops.

The collapse of the economic base of Kurdistan, initiated by Saddam Hussein's attempts at rural depopulation, intensified by chaos, plunder, sanctions against Iraq in general and Baghdad's sanctions against Kurdistan in particular, have all combined to produce a labour force that has no means to live apart from offering its services as mercenaries for the war lords.

So what's left of the Kurdish dream? Remember Beirut's militias? I do.

The writer is an Iraqi social scientist, resident in Holland.

## Blind man's bluff

By El-Sayed Elewa

"Blind privatisation" is a term I have come across in papers from a seminar organised three years ago in Egypt by Harvard University. Blind privatisation, by definition, is a policy which lacks the proper evaluation of its positive and negative impacts, particularly with respect to field evaluation of public sector company performance before they are privatised.

It is an ideological and dogmatic attitude which is anti-public ownership, very much resembling the communist view of private ownership. It regards the problem to be inherent only in the type of ownership, and maintains that any transition from public to private ownership would improve performance. Ignoring that the private sector sometimes suffers from bad management and poor performance. In this way privatisation can be a real threat to national assets and properties. However, if privatisation is regarded as part and parcel of other economic programmes such as improving performance, upgrading information systems and advancing incentives methods, we can develop a sound understanding of what projects should be sold immediately, which to defer and which should not be sold at all.

Wise privatisation should be a part of a collection of reform policies that include rationalising the priorities of privatisation, application of performance contracts systems (memorandums of understanding) between the government and the public sector industries, implementing effective incentive systems to encourage competition and management by objectives, not bureaucratic regulations.

As such, an effective economic reform policy is deregulation, not de-nationalisation. Egypt is following a gradual economic reform programme so that it does not fall into the trap of blind privatisation.

The writer is a professor of Political Science at Helwan University and director of Al-Qarar Consulting Centre.

## Seaside shopping

There is little about Marsa Matrouh that would make it appear cosmopolitan. The town itself, which is one of the closest points to El-Salloum on the Libyan border, is small and characterised by more dirt roads than paved ones. And, except for a few months during the year, it is rarely visited by outsiders.

Come summertime, however, Marsa Matrouh receives a new lease on life. Tourists from Cairo and Alexandria flock in for some fun in the sun by the beach, and, in so doing, provide the local residents with much of the year's income.

Aside from the surf and turf specials, the city's main lure for tourists is that it is replete with imported goods, including food and electrical appliances, the majority of which are smuggled across the border from Libya.

On virtually every street corner, grocery stores, such as the one owned by Mahmoud El-Welaty, boast an array of imported foodstuffs, many of which come from Asia, Turkey and Italy.

"These products," he said, "are mainly for the tourist since residents of Marsa Matrouh can't afford imported products." The brisk summer trade in imported commodities that El-Welaty and others like him enjoy, he noted, is mainly due to the novelty factor, given that the goods, themselves, are really no better than those produced in Egypt.

"People are attracted to anything that is imported, automatically assuming that it must be better than those items produced in the local market," said El-Welaty. In fact, he argued, the purchases are just another way for them to enjoy their holiday and to stay busy in the eve-

Waiting for vacationers

ing when there is nothing else to do.

For those tourists not interested in imported biscuits and oil, some bargains can be found in *Souq Libya* (the Libyan Market), which stocks an array of Libyan-made electrical appliance sand beauty products. Until last year, vendors in the *souq* displayed their wares in wood or straw kiosks. But this summer, the authorities moved the *souq* to the western part of town, where a row of white concrete shops have

these items for sale at a later date means that shop owners and merchants are able to realise a sizeable profit.

Also of benefit to the Egyptian consumer is the fact that Libyans, given their relatively high incomes, are more prone to frequently discarding used appliances and furniture, replacing them with new ones. Realising this, many Egyptian merchants purchase these items at second-hand prices and sell them as new in Marsa Matrouh.

However, this practice is shunned by some shop owners. Salah Salem, unlike many of his fellow shopkeepers, refused to stock Libyan goods, maintaining that there is no guarantee of their quality.

Until recent security problems prompted stricter border security measures, stated Salem, smuggling electronics from Libya was a common practice. "Often, donkeys were loaded with five or six video cassette players and were sent into the desert. These animals know their way quite well, and arrived with the goods, which were later sold in the *souq*," he explained.

For consumers, this meant that they could purchase Libyan appliances and entertainment systems at prices substantially lower than those of their Egyptian counterparts. However, he stated, the quality was also significantly inferior.

"When people see two seemingly identical video machines for different prices, they buy the cheaper one, without considering how long it will last," he stated. The prices, he added, are also lower because, as they are smuggled, no customs duties are paid.

Most merchants admit that the ongoing trade across the border is beneficial to both sides. Abeer Mohamed, a 17-year old shop clerk in the *souq*, states that chronic shortages of some goods such as tomatoes in Egypt makes stocking up on Libyan tomato paste a worthwhile alternative. Moreover, since most of the cross-border trade is transacted at wholesale price and sold at the market rate, stocking

## No jobs in Saudi Arabia

Drastic cuts in the number of foreigners working in Saudi Arabia have left Egyptian recruitment companies reeling and the workers in dire straits, reports Mona El-Fiqi

Up until last year, Saudi Arabia was one of the main sources of employment for Egyptian workers. But over the past year, the Saudi government has announced a drastic cut in the number of permits granted to foreigners seeking to work there and, as a result, 120 Egyptian recruitment firms have been forced to close their doors.

"Recruitment companies do not receive any more Saudi work contracts for Egyptian labour," said Mohamed Abul-Maged, head of the general division for recruitment companies at the Egyptian Federation of Chambers of Commerce (EFCC). "It is, however, the main market for Egyptian labour, and in the past it needed over 500,000 workers per year."

Abul-Maged believes that the Saudi government is now aiming to recruit workers from other Arab and foreign countries, instead of primarily from Egypt. While no official decree has been passed explicitly stating this, recruitment figures indicate that this is indeed the case. His company, said Abul-Maged, used to receive 100 Saudi contracts per month, but now receives only one or two. Drastic decreases like this have been reported by scores of other recruiting firms, and reveal that another 260 companies are in danger of also being forced to close their doors.

"If this attitude will benefit the Saudi government, then no one can really blame them," said Abul-Maged. Ministry of Manpower and Immigration statistics reveal that the number of Egyptians working in Saudi Arabia fell from 1.2 million in 1994 to 900,000 in 1995.

While the Egyptian government has proffered no specific explanation for these sharp cuts in contracts, the Saudi government said that it is simply drawing up a new set of regulations for foreign labour, and does not aim to decrease the number of Egyptians working in the country.

Mohamed Kiki, press attaché at the Saudi Em-

bassy in Cairo, said, "The Saudi government, like any other government, gives the country's new graduates priority over foreign labour."

"There is no official decree that denies Egyptians the opportunity to secure a work contract in Saudi," he added. "These regulations were aimed at foreign labour, not Egyptians, because a large number of workers used to arrive in the country without real jobs."

The Saudi government

National Committee for Private Recruitment Offices at the Saudi Council for Chambers of Commerce and Industry. The two parties agreed to hammer out an agreement on bilateral recruitment between the two countries. After preparing the agreement's articles, the Egyptian Federation for Chambers of Commerce sent an invitation to the Saudi side to come to Egypt, study the agreement

power and Immigration where Abdel-Kader El-Assal, the ministry's counsellor on international cooperation, said that the ministry is exerting tremendous efforts to solve the problem by promoting Egyptian-Saudi relations and facilitating the work for recruitment companies.

"During last week's meeting with representatives of the recruitment companies," said El-Assal, "El-Amawi agreed to grant these companies the right to work in other fields as a temporary solution to the financial problems resulting from these Saudi initiatives."

This exception, however, is valid only for a limited time, he stressed.

Recruitment companies may have found a temporary way out of the financial catch they are facing, but for many Egyptians who depend on securing Saudi work contracts, the picture is not so clear.

Ola Taha, an Egyptian teacher working in Saudi Arabia, said that as a result of the new policy, her husband's Saudi work contract will not be renewed.

Notwithstanding this fact, Egyptian recruitment companies and, more importantly, Egyptians who seek work in Saudi Arabia, have been dealt a hard blow. To help solve the problem, said Abdel-Gueili Megahed, head of the Cairo Chamber of Commerce's recruitment division, Ahmed El-Amawi, Egypt's minister of manpower and immigration, travelled to Saudi Arabia and held talks with members of the



The 1970s were the heyday of recruitment offices

photo: Fathy Hussain

and sign it. The Saudi side, however, requested that the signing be postponed.

In a related initiative, the general division for recruitment companies at the EFCC sent a memo to El-Amawi, asking for ministry assistance in resolving this problem. In response to their request, a seminar was held last week at the Ministry of Man-

this year. To date, Taha and thousands like her have heard several reasons for this new trend, none of which have been verified as being the real reason. In fact, the only reality, she says, is that many Egyptians, like her husband, have not had their contracts renewed, and thousands more will not be able to secure these documents at all.

## Mutual funds face legal hurdles

The activities of mutual funds are still restricted by a number of impediments, argues Mona Qassem

The performance of the mutual funds established under Capital Market Law 95 of 1992 is affected by a number of legal and administrative factors that must be taken into consideration while evaluating their success as a new investment option.

So far, legislative restrictions have proven to be the biggest obstacle confronting the management of mutual funds. While investment policy is the responsibility of the fund manager, management options are limited by the constraints of Law 95 and its executive charter.

This law, seeking to diversify the investment risks, has placed limits on the funds' investment structure. Its executive charter stipulates that the percentage of the fund's money invested in the stock of a specific company must not exceed 10 per cent of the fund's capital or, alternatively, 15 per cent of the value of the company's shares. These conditions aim to guarantee that no one fund will monopolise the stock of a particular company or industry. Additionally, it prohibits funds from investing more than 10 per cent of their capital in other mutual funds, or an amount that exceeds five per cent of the capital of the other mutual

On the other hand, the law has opened the door for funds to invest in other channels such as treasury bills, bank deposits, savings certificates and bonds. Moreover, the number of shares available for purchase to one fund manager is limited as a result of a scarcity of shares in strong companies. This is mainly due to the fact that the government is only offering minority stakes in public sector companies to be privatised.

The Capital Market's legislative committee also plays a role in controlling the funds' activities by stipulating that fluctuations in share value should not exceed 20 per cent during a week's trading activity. This rule is aimed to protect investors and the market, itself, from any sudden collapse.

Legislation, however, is not the only obstacle confronting mutual funds. Capital market activity is a second factor affecting their performance. Mutual funds came into existence at a time when the market was witnessing a number of changes, such as the creation of several financial institutions and brokerage companies that came into being as a result of Egypt's privatisation experience.

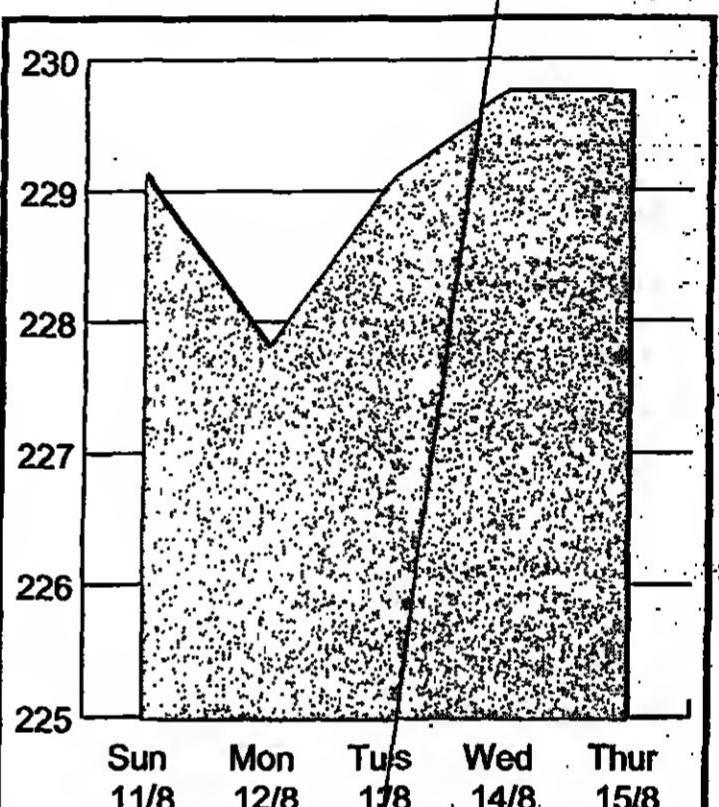
Market instability also compounded matters. The value of shares fluctuated dramatically from day to day. For example, in October 1994, a dramatic increase in share values prompted many investors to sell in order to realise a profit. But, the mass liquidation led to an abundance in the supply of shares without a corresponding demand.

At the end of the same month, the government announced that it will sell the shares of 17 of the companies to be privatised. This decision fuelled investor desire to divest in order to gain enough liquidity to buy the new stocks. Taken together, both events resulted in a supply of shares on the market that far exceeded the demand, and prices dropped.

It was during this period that mutual funds emerged on the market. Fund managers were convinced that the demand in the market was temporary and seized the opportunity to buy low. However, the market slump continued well into 1995, mainly due to investor restraint in anticipation of the share offerings that had been delayed from 1994.

By the middle of 1995, the market was on the upswing, in part due to the trading action on the part of the mutual funds. Despite the increase in activity, however, investors were soon disappointed to find that the returns they received fell short of those they expected.

## Market report



## Oil and Soap leads trading

THE GENERAL Market Index gained 1.66 points to close at 229.76 points for the week ending 15 August. The index for the manufacturing sector also witnessed an increase, gaining 3.15 points to close at 226.48, partly as a result of an increase in the share value of El-Nas Clothing and Textiles Company (Kabo). The company's share gained LE7 to close at LE133 per share. Shares of the Torab Portland Cement Company gained LE2.99, close at LE52.5. Over the wed, 9.205 of the company's share, worth LE373,186, changed hands. A similar gain was realised by El-Mohandes Insurance Company, whose shares increased by LE9 per share to close at LE23.9, after trading 180,570 shares valued at LE651,558, changed hands.

Also in the financial sector, five companies witnessed a marginal loss in their share values. Topping the list were those of El-Mohandes Insurance Company, which fell by LE1.11 to close at LE21.22.

The week's stars, however, were in the manufacturing sector, with the Egypt Oil and Soap Company trading the largest number of shares. Over 3.3 million shares, accounting for 54 per cent of total market transactions, and valued at \$500m, were traded. And, LE102.8 million, per share to close at LE8.

The financial sector's index gained 1.49 points to close at 34.6 points after opening at 33.1. The increase in the index was partially attributed to an LE25 per share

## Securing securities

THE CAPITAL Market Authority met with over 125 Egyptian brokers last week to discuss the creation of Egypt's central depositary system (CDS).

Given the increasing trading activity on the stock exchange, the CDS will enable brokers to increase the flow of trading while reducing risk and expediting the efficient delivery of securities once payment is received.

Based on international standards, the CDS has already been created in several emerging markets, including Lebanon, Libya and Poland.

"With trading constantly increasing on the market, it is critical that Egypt implement a system to help efficiently manage securities," said Abd-Hamid Ibrahim, chairman of the Capital Market Authority (CMA). "With the creation of the CDS, investors can rest assured that their securities are being handled according to international standards, procedures and regulations."

## FECC elections

THE FEDERATION of Egyptian Chambers of Commerce (FECC) is scheduled to hold elections for the board of directors of both the federation and the individual chambers on 2 September. Among the 34 candidates running for the posts are Mamoun Thabet Mekki, deputy chairman of the Federation of Egyptian Industries, Mahmud El-Arabi, chairman of the FECC, and several prominent businessmen and members of parliament.

These elections were scheduled to be held two years ago, but were delayed because the chamber's members were anticipating the passing of a law regulating the operations of the chambers of commerce. However, the law never materialised, and the elections, which should be held every five years, were again scheduled.

Edited by Ghada Ragab

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## Al-Ahram: A Diwan of contemporary life

The success and progress of the students of Al-Azhar University are the greatest factor in the advancement of the Orient and the enlightenment of the Islamic nation, because, as we have said and continue to say, the Islamic nation is the greatest force in the Orient. From Al-Azhar, progress will emanate and by enhancing its stature we enhance the stature of the entire Orient. Thus, may its honourable masters know that within their grip is the hope of nations and that every body of knowledge they disseminate in the minds of their students offers a new means to revitalise the eastern nations in general and the Egyptian nation in particular. May God on High grant them success in the service of mankind."

With these words published in *Al-Ahram* on 13 July 1900 Al-Azhar Mosque turned its back on the old century and prepared to embark on the new. Its farewell to the previous century was not without some relief; for its closing years marked a tempestuous period in the history of this ancient institution.

The 19th century was the era of building the modern state. The extension of centralised government to all parts of the country naturally brought with it the conflict between the new authorities and older powers. This conflict would extend to the doors of Al-Azhar. Indeed it began early in the era of the founder of the ruling dynasty, Mohamed Ali Pasha, who attempted to neutralise Al-Azhar as a political force by setting its sheikhs against each other. His tactics were noted with sorrow in the chronicles of the famous Egyptian historian Abdel-Rahman El-Jabarti.

By the end of the century, the government's objectives had been attained. The central government had the power to appoint the sheikh of Al-Azhar by supreme edict. The *waqf* (religious endowment) lands that had belonged to the institution and that had long been a source of its financial autonomy came under the hegemony of the *Waqf* Authority which had yet to become a ministry, and the allocations for its religious and educational activities were contingent upon the will of government officials.

Yet the prestige of Al-Azhar was still such that when the British occupied Egypt and extended their control over many administrative, economic and educational institutions, they kept a cautious distance from Al-Azhar, the *waqf* foundations and the religious courts. The high commissioner, Lord Cromer, was fully aware of Egyptians' sensitivities with regard to any infringement upon their religious organisations and that the risks of igniting a spirit of instability among the populace were too great.

In addition, although secular education had existed in Egypt since Mohamed Ali and there were many institutes of higher learning, Al-Azhar was the only institution having the characteristics of a university. Each sheikh had his own college; students would select the tutor under whom they would study and they could aspire to academic degrees up to the equivalent of a doctorate. Many Egyptians who completed their education in modern institutions of

learning and who later acquired fame in their particular fields had begun their education in Al-Azhar. Two in particular were Rifaa Rafia El-Tahtawi and Saad Zaghlul. At the same time, belonging to Al-Azhar continued to provide a special status, particularly for some rural-based families. Heads of household would prefer to send their sons to Cairo to receive instruction at this venerable institution, regardless of how modern their outlook was. It was not until 1908 that Egypt had an alternative in Al-Azhar. This was when the first secular university opened its doors in Cairo, and then only modestly as a *community institution*.

Because of its religious character, Al-Azhar was, as it continues to be today, an international body, welcoming scholars from all quarters of the Islamic world. Its open galleries, divided according to the provinces and nationalities of the students; mapped the ebb and flow of petitioners for knowledge at the gates of this prestigious university from around the world. Students came from Syria in the north to Sudan in the south, from Ethiopia in the east to Africa to Morocco, Mauritania and Senegal in the west. Even students from as far away as India and Indonesia had their own wing. Such was the prestige associated with this institution that graduates adopted the epithet "Al-Azhar" and handed it down as a family name through generations.

We turn now to Al-Azhar's turbulent final decade of the 19th century and the events that brought it to the threshold of a new era, events keenly monitored by *Al-Ahram*.

Hardy had the decade opened than the Khedive Tawfiq passed away (1892) and his son, Abbas Helmi II ascended the throne. The most notorious instance is the Falaki government crisis (1893) and the Sudan border incident (1894). On the other hand, he found no resistance from the British when it came to imposing his control over the religious institutions, foremost among which was Al-Azhar. The British were, as we said, too leery of tampering in this domain.

In the years that followed the British occupation, Egypt's links with the Ottoman Supreme Porte became more and more disrupted, particularly after negotiations between London and Istanbul (1886-1887) to evacuate the British from Egypt collapsed. In addition, Egyptian relations with North Africa after Algeria (in 1830) and Tunisia (in 1881) fell under French occupation and after the overland route through Egypt to the *hajj* was largely circumvented by the opening of the Suez Canal (1869). These developments, in particular, affected the vitality of the North African student corridors in Al-Azhar, which in turn detracted from its international stature. Against this backdrop, Abbas made his first move in 1894, the year when he was bested by the British over the Sudan border debacle. The rector of Al-Azhar, Sheikh Mohammed El-Imbabi had been taken seriously ill, and Abbas appointed "the distinguished professor, Sheikh

143 Al-Azhar, the Muslim world's oldest and most venerable theological institute, founded in 970, became the target of government intervention in the 19th century. This was the result of the modernisation drive launched by the ruling dynasty that began with Mohamed Ali Pasha. The meddling became flagrant during the reign of Abbas Helmi II, who became khedive in 1892. In this instalment of his chronicles of Egyptian life as reported by *Al-Ahram*, Dr Yunan Labib Rizq tells the story of the conflict between the royal palace and Al-Azhar in the last decade of the 19th century, climaxing in a student rebellion



Hassuna El-Nawawi, one of the senior *ulema* of Al-Azhar and an instructor of Islamic law and Prophetic tradition in the Royal College of Law and Dar Al-Ulum, as the acting rector of Al-Azhar so that he may assume the responsibilities of the venerable Sheikh El-Imbabi during the period of his convalescence. It is a most appropriate appointment and the care of His Royal Highness the Khedive in his deliberations over this decision has been fully appreciated by all members of Al-Azhar.

But this was no ordinary appointment as the remainder of the article published in *Al-Ahram* on 8 December demonstrates. The article reported that the khedive would shortly issue a supreme edict for the creation of a board of direction "elected from the venerable *ulema* of this noble institution representing the four orthodox schools of Islam in order to oversee the administration of the affairs of the illustrious mosque." Evidently, this was the agency through which Abdin would influence Al-Azhar's affairs, for the board would "implement the wishes of His Royal Highness the Khedive and the aspirations of right-minded Muslims eager to see its administration in proper order, its standards of education elevated and its prestige augmented."

During the first half of 1895, Abbas' policy was to seduce into his confidence a number of influential Al-Azhar officials. His method, of which one notes frequent reports

would not take this rebuff kindly. On the morning of 3 June Egyptians learned that El-Nawawi had been dismissed from both of his posts. *Al-Ahram* protested that his dismissal constituted retribution, not against the man himself, but "against Egyptian public opinion."

The following day Sheikh Abdel Rahman Qutb El-Nawawi was appointed as Hassuna El-Nawawi's successor, yet he only lasted a few days, to be replaced by Sheikh Salim El-Bishri, who was to institute the reforms that Sheikh Mohamed Abdu had advocated. Indeed, Mohamed Abdu would be actively involved, for he was appointed as the *mufti* at the same time, it having been decided that both positions should not be assigned to the same individual. The first step of the new rector was to draw up a new university curriculum and to create an examinations board consisting of senior *ulema*.

Another touch the khedive would have on Al-Azhar occurred on 17 March 1896. The occasion was the inauguration of a new students gallery. Unlike the other galleries that throughout the history of this institution had been named after the points of origin of the students coming from all parts of the Islamic world to study at the mosque, the name of the new gallery would be an anomaly. Named after the khedive himself, the Abbas gallery was a tangible symbol of the palace's intervention in Al-Azhar's affairs.

As this once powerful edifice came increasingly under government sway, an event took place within the walls of Al-Azhar that would rock its international stature. The incident, occurring in the Levant gallery, was reported in *Al-Ahram* of 3 June 1896. According to the newspaper's account, the rector of Al-Azhar had learned that two nights previously a student from that gallery, "having fallen seriously ill, informed a fellow student that he could not go to the hospital because everyone who goes there dies." When, the following day, the doctor tried to take the ailing student to the hospital, "the students obstructed and threatened the doctor who immediately reported this incident to our department." The rector continues, "We went to the gallery to ask to have the ailing student transported to the hospital. The students protested furiously and although we tried to reassure them they shouted at us: 'We will not let you take him away even if we have to die!' and they started to clap and raise such a commotion that we were forced to call for the police commissioner." Then some of the Syrians rushed to the administrative headquarters of Al-Azhar "in order to shout threats at us," the rector said.

Over the next four years, the Khedive watched the activities of the new rector closely. Evidently, El-Nawawi kept a tight grip over Al-Azhar affairs, permitting only a small margin for government interference. His influence was bolstered by the fact that he was both the rector and the *mufti*. In May 1899 he opposed a proposed reshuffling in the supreme religious court and succeeded in prevailing upon the Legislative Council to reject the proposal. The government

had on Al-Azhar's position within the Islamic world. This was one of the rare occasions in the history of that famous institution in which the central authorities suspended its academic operations, even if only temporarily. Certainly, the implications had an impact on many who saw its mission as an international educational institution imperilled. On their behalf, *Al-Ahram* cited numerous petitions to the khedive "to pardon those who have been banished from the corpus of the students at Al-Azhar and to reopen the Levant gallery." It concludes, "we have no doubt that His Royal Highness will respond sympathetically at the appropriate time, given his noble and merciful nature."

The petitions were answered. On 8 December *Al-Ahram* announced, "His Royal Highness the Khedive has pardoned the Syrian students, precipitating a widely felt sense of rejoice and high hopes that he will soon order the Levant gallery to open its doors again for study." This, in fact, occurred a year later, although as Al-Azhar turned to the new century, the incident would remain a signpost of the gradual decline of Al-Azhar's prestige in the Muslim world.

were we able to push our way through and overpower the rebels... Five of the students were shot. One died immediately from his wounds and the others were sent directly to the hospital on stretchers. As for the ailing student, who had cholera, he was found dead inside his room and his corpse was taken to the hospital."

A week afterwards, the Council of Ministers issued a resolution pertaining to the incident. Published in the *Egyptian Gazette* and reported in *Al-Ahram*, the resolution announced that the prosecution would continue to pursue the legal procedures to bring charges against the 14 students from the Levant gallery "who are proven to have been responsible for provoking revolt and insulting the government's law enforcement representatives." The remainder of the students of the gallery "who are still under security detention shall, with the cognisance of the Egyptian government, be returned to their countries of origin for having participated in this rebellion." Finally, "for the continued order and security of the remaining loggia, the Levant gallery shall be closed for a period of six full months as of 6 June so that this lesson may be firmly implanted in the minds of all."

On 12 June the Sayeda Zeinab Court announced its verdicts against the students who had been brought to trial. Five were sentenced to two and a half years of prison, seven were sentenced to nine months in prison and two were acquitted. Commenting on the verdicts, *Al-Ahram* wrote, "The court used little leniency, which is why everyone considers their ruling harsh."

Harsher yet, were the implications this had on Al-Azhar's position within the Islamic world. This was one of the rare occasions in the history of that famous institution in which the central authorities suspended its academic operations, even if only temporarily. Certainly, the implications had an impact on many who saw its mission as an international educational institution imperilled. On their behalf, *Al-Ahram* cited numerous petitions to the khedive "to pardon those who have been banished from the corpus of the students at Al-Azhar and to reopen the Levant gallery." It concludes, "we have no doubt that His Royal Highness will respond sympathetically at the appropriate time, given his noble and merciful nature."

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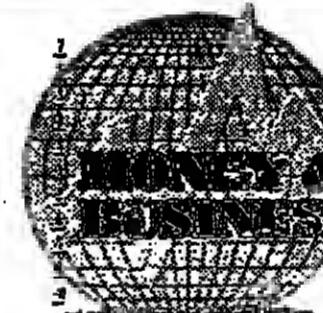
The author is a professor of history and head of Al-Ahram History Studies Centre.

### Increasing Egyptian-Swedish ties

RIDA EL-ADL, dean of the Faculty of Commerce at Ain Shams University travelled to Sweden at the invitation of the University of Falster to give a series of lectures on strengthening relations between the two universities.

The Faculty of Commerce at Ain Shams has exerted considerable efforts towards increasing socio-economic, as well as scientific activities between the faculty and other universities, with the aim of yielding positive and fruitful results that will benefit all strata of society.

## MONEY & BUSINESS



### Faisal Islamic Bank of Egypt continues growth

ABDEL-HAMID Abu Musa, director of the Faisal Islamic Bank of Egypt, said that the bank has realised a surplus in its commercial activities of approximately LE318.1m for the year 1416AH (May 1995-1996) ending 18 May 1996, as opposed to LE310.5m obtained during the previous year. Returns of nearly LE275.4m were distributed to investment account owners, up from LE235.9m that was distributed during the previous year.

The bank recorded a growth in different areas. The total balance of the bank was LE6423.8m, up from LE6226.5m in the previous year. Deposit accounts

reached a total of LE5100.7m, as opposed to LE4933.3m in the previous year. Investment accounts grew to a total of LE5626.8m, whereas in the previous year accounts had been LE5665.3m. Revenues of the bank increased to LE571.1m, achieving an annual growth over the previous year by 12.4 per cent.

The governor pointed towards the emerging role of the bank in participating in development projects in Egypt. The number of companies established by the bank or held shares in at the end of 1416AH totalled 38, covering all areas of economic activity, with total capitals of LE1121m, while

the share of the bank in the capitals of the companies totalled LE196m. Most of the companies directly offer their products and services within the local market, while others serve the Arab, European and North American markets.

The bank has established five companies involved in agriculture and mineral resources, eight in the industrial sector, six pharmaceutical and medical companies, three local and foreign commercial companies, two construction and housing companies, seven banking and financial companies, in addition to seven companies working in other fields.

### Egyptian company wins bid

THE ALEXANDRIAN Company for Steel and Iron in El-Dakha has been awarded a contract to export 21,000 tons of reinforced steel with a value of \$6mn to Tunisia. Yaman Felfela, head of the Egyptian-Tunisian Commercial and Investment Association, said that numerous companies participated in the bidding, among them Ukraine, Sweden and Spain. Based on the quality of production from the Alexandria Company, Egypt was chosen for the contract. A high-level delegation from Tunisia will visit Egypt next week to inspect the factory and make the final preparations.

### CACE offers certificate in accounting

THE CENTER for Adult and Continuing Education (CACE) at the American University in Cairo will offer the Advanced Accounting Certificate (AAC) this year. Completion of this programme will prepare students to work in the field of accounting, whether domestically or abroad. In addition to the AAC, CACE offers the Pre-CPA and the Professional Certificate in Modern Accounting (MAC).

Bahgat Musa, head of the Business Studies Division at CACE, said that the AAC certificate is being offered for the first time this year, which is intended for graduates from the English section of business schools who wish to broaden their horizons in the field of accounting. Students without prior experience in accounting in English and university graduates are advised to take the MAC which is well-known and of high value in the labour market, and one which will pave the way for the student to complete his CPA. Likewise, for the professional accountant who wishes to prepare for the CPA exam, CACE offers a pre-CPA programme.

### InTouch expands its digital infrastructure to the WTC



Osama A. Fouad, general manager of WTC, with Akram Farah, operations director of InTouch, after signing the contract

ON 15 August 1996, InTouch Communications Services signed a contract with the World Trade Centre (WTC) in Cairo allowing InTouch to provide a full set of Internet access services enabled through a local extension.

These services range from PC dial-up all the way to LAN connection services, in addition to local support at the WTC.

The following preliminary services are offered:

- Local Internet dial-up access
- Dedicated LAN access
- LAN on-demand access
- PC dedicated access

As a result, WTC will be the first trade centre in Africa and the Middle East to offer full Internet services.

**Faisal Islamic Bank of Egypt Statement for the end of 1416AH (May 1995/May 1996)**

Results achieved (in LE mn)	End of 1416AH (18 May 1995)	End of 1415AH (29 May 1995)	Percentage of growth
Total balance	6424.8	6226.5	3.2
Customer deposits	5100.7	4933.3	3.4
Investment balance	5826.6	5665.3	2.8
Resources (ownership rights and reserves)	571.1	508.0	12.4
Total revenues	367.1	349.8	5.1
Net profits	287.2	245.9	16.8
Investment account dividends	275.5	245.9	12.0

With its major investment activities, Faisal Islamic Bank of Egypt continues to play an active role in boosting a variety of vital sectors within the national economy. It provides financing to these sectors with the aim of providing all materials, equipment, buildings and land needed for the establishment of production projects. The number of financing operations which the bank provided for the year 1416AH (1996) reached 9432, with a total value of LE 3.3bn. Additionally, the bank has established and holds shares in 38 companies within vital economic sectors.

The number of the bank's reached 38 at the end of 1416AH, having capitals valued at LE409mn and \$294.5m. Of these capitals, the bank has a share of LE 129mn and \$43.7mn.

The bank's zakat fund witnessed a major growth over the previous years, reaching LE5.3mn at the end of 1416AH. The balance of loans provided by this fund reached half a million LE at the end of 1416AH.

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## Values for votes

Partisan politics in the US, by its very nature, is rhetoric-filled and capriciously quixotic, as it must be to attract the attention of the electorate. More than extolling the values and virtues of the individual candidate, they seek to undermine the qualifications and record of the challenger. But in the case of the Dole-Clinton race, especially after the Republican convention drew to a close last week, any charges hurled by either candidate are tantamount to the pot calling the kettle black.

Both candidates have shifted their position on key issues more times than any pundit can remember. And the return to values, a notion which both parties now claim to represent with equal commitment and tenacity, has become a hollow rallying cry with which to woo a disillusioned and disgruntled electorate. Like most of the other campaign slogans and platforms, however, Dole and Clinton's notion on values is as hollow as the sound bites Dole is unable to utter with any degree of proficiency.

Takes, for example, both parties' platforms with regard to the Middle East. Both wholeheartedly support Israel, Netanyahu and Likud. Both honour Rubin for his contribution to the peace process. And both are equally unwilling to take the necessary steps to realising this peace, unless it directly affects the US's security interests. In other words, values like justice, commitment, compromise and integrity are subject to interpretation and prioritising on the basis of how self-serving they are.

But it is still convenient for them to speak of values. It is convenient to honour a dead prime minister for a cause to which they are afraid to embrace. And it is imperative that they compromise, especially when taking a firm stand on anything of substance may cost them votes. After all, in the American political arena, the political worth of values is judged by how many votes they will earn the candidate. And, more often than not, the value of the vote far exceeds the value of integrity, commitment and the lives of innocents.

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## Erbakan charts Asian waters

Turkey's new prime minister is navigating a fine line between regional clout and national interests, writes Fahmy Howeydi

Events in Ankara have captured international attention since Necmettin Erbakan of the Refah (Welfare) Party assumed his responsibilities as prime minister in an alliance with the Straight Path Party (DYP). In itself, the coalition is worthy of interest. It is probably the first time an Islamic and a strongly secularist party share power in a country that repudiated an Islamic orientation over seven decades ago. The Turkish experiment has particular significance in that it offers a successful model for an Islamist accession to power after many years of participation in political life. At the same time, the division of the cabinet between the Refah and the DYP illustrates how national parties can join forces in the service of public causes, despite strong, indeed virtually antithetical, ideological differences. This phenomenon has been closely observed in Western political circles. One US State Department official, commenting on the situation in Turkey said that secularism is not the primary issue — the essential issue is democracy.

It is clear that he has been extremely careful to avoid any potentially explosive confrontations that could upset the current course of his leadership, indicating that he is aware of being only a partner in government and that, in two years, it will be Mr Ciller's turn to take over as prime minister. He also appears aware that, because the Refah is not the ruling party, his ability to manoeuvre is restricted, and it may prove impossible to fulfil all his electoral pledges.

As a result, Erbakan has stayed clear of the established political "red lines" that would bring him into a clash with the army or the US. Rather, he has acted in areas that affect the immediate interests of the Turkish people. On the domestic front, he has promoted a bill calling for a 50 per cent increase in employees' salaries, winning him great popular acclaim. At the same time, he has taken a refreshing approach to the Kurdish problem, preferring a political tact to the military solution which most Turkish governments in the past have advocated so adamantly. He visited Kurdish villages, and asked refugees to return to their homes. In addition to reports of communications between his representatives and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), he has proposed a summit between the four countries directly affected by the Kurdish problem — Iran, Syria, Iraq and Turkey — in order to examine ways to alleviate it.

In foreign affairs, Erbakan renewed the mandate of the US-led multi-national force based in Turkey and sent letters to European governments requesting that Turkey intends to maintain strong relations with the West. He has thus dispelled anxieties in Western political circles over the direction of his foreign policy.

The military agreement with Israel, however, is a problem of some delicacy. He declared from the outset that his government would abide by agreements concluded by previous Turkish gov-

ernments, as long as they do not conflict with Turkish interests. The agreement has been detrimental to Turkish relations in the Arab world, notably with its neighbours, Syria and Iraq, and with Egypt. But as the agreement was signed by the Turkish army, with strong US backing of course, any inclination to take stronger stance would propel him beyond the "red lines" referred to above. Available information, however, suggests that the Erbakan government has little enthusiasm for the agreement and that, within the limits at hand, it will seek to stall its implementation, or at least prevent any further expansion (the Israeli government has expressed hopes that the agreement would be a prelude to more extensive military cooperation with Turkey).

On the other hand, Erbakan's boldest move to date was the conclusion of the natural gas agreement with Iran. Under that "deal of the century", worth some \$23 billion (last week's *Al-Ahram Weekly* cited \$20 billion), Iran will export a total of 190 billion cubic metres of natural gas to Turkey between 1998 and 2020. Beyond the size of the deal itself are the implications of its timing, coming as it does shortly after the US Congress approved a bill calling for sanctions on non-US companies making new investments of over \$40 million in Iran or Libya's oil and gas sectors. Although the wording does not apply specifically to the Turkish government, the deal has enormous political ramifications, since it violates the "spirit" of the law, designed to tighten the economic cordon around Iran. The Turkish deal undoubtedly represents a considerable setback to Turkey's foreign policy.

In addition, Erbakan has sent two of his ministers to Iraq to discuss possibilities for promoting mutual economic relations. This move definitely brings him within the danger zone circumscribed by American policy. Clearly he is on the verge of violating the US administration's

policy of "dual containment" with regard to Iran and Iraq.

Erbakan signed the gas deal with Iran during his course of an Asian tour during which he visited, after Iran, Pakistan, Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia. Observers have interpreted this tour toward the East as a cautious attempt to extricate Turkey from its US-Israeli orbit and allow it to stake out a place of its own among the Asian-Islamic countries. If this is indeed the case, it strongly suggests that Erbakan's actions are but a prelude, to be followed by an attempt to assert Turkey's strategic re-orientation.

Of particular note during Erbakan's visit to Malaysia were his talks with the Malaysian prime minister, during which he discussed Turkey's participation in the second Euro-Asian summit to be held next year. The first Euro-Asian summit, held in Bangkok last March, was attended by all the EU countries as well as Japan, China, South Korea, Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Vietnam. If Turkey does attend the Euro-Asian summit next year, this will confirm an Asian orientation that may not remove it from its European orbit, but will certainly weaken ties to the US. More importantly, such a move would lay a solid foundation for Turkey's Asian and Arab realignment. This, in turn, will enhance its regional and international status and restore some of its former clout as an influential power in the region. Lamenting the loss of this status, a Turkish intellectual has written: "Turkey was once at the head of the nations of the East. Under Kemalism it became a tail, content to remain at the back of the West." If, indeed, we see a more independent policy in the making, it may remedy this situation.

One question remains: How will the forces favourable to keeping Turkey in the US orbit react? Again, it is too early to give an adequate answer. Yet by moving cautiously, Erbakan has kept a large slice of the armed forces and business community behind him. Together, they could remain on an even keel as he steers a course towards promoting Turkish independence and defending the country's interests.

## Heikal, Begin and Netanyahu

In the light of Heikal's *Secret Channels*, Mohamed Sid-Ahmed questions whether a parallel can be drawn between Begin's premiership in 1977 and Netanyahu's in 1996

"between us" and President Assad, whom the king seemed to hold in high esteem. From the very start, it seems that the Arab leaders who dealt directly with Israel believed that Assad would eventually follow the same path.

It is axiomatic that in the hierarchy of any modern state structure the position of the top decision-maker differs qualitatively from those of even his closest collaborators. The latter are accountable only to the constituency which elected them, while the top decision-maker is vulnerable to pressures coming from the external environment as well. Even if we assume that Netanyahu, who claims to be the "president of all Israelis" and not only of the hardliners who swept him to power, is ready to moderate his stance, his ability to assert his independence from such intractable — and powerful — lieutenants as Sharon and Eytan is questionable.

Commenting on the 1977 Israeli elections, Heikal notes that "there was evidence of covert CIA funding of the Labour Party's electoral campaign". 1996 saw a repeat performance of Washington's failed attempt to influence the outcome of Israeli elections in Labour's favour. The first failure may have figured in Sadat's decision to dispense with American mediation and deal directly with the Israeli leadership. Can the second failure lead to a development as dramatic as Sadat's Jerusalem visit, in which Damascus playing host to Netanyahu in a bid to avert all-out war?

Heikal reveals that Sadat was not the first Arab ruler to establish direct contact with Israel's leadership, and that King Hussein had met earlier with Moshe Dayan. At the meeting, the king expressed readiness to conclude a separate deal with Israel, provided the West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza were placed under Hashemite control, thereby silencing Arab critics. When Dayan told the king bluntly that his proposal was impossible, the king countered that the whole idea of a separate settlement was out of the question.

According to Heikal, Sadat was not aware that the Jordanian monarch had preceded him in direct negotiations with the Israelis. Following his meeting with King Hussein, Dayan reported that the king was optimistic about the prospect of a meeting

Even if he is, his freedom of manoeuvre is severely hampered by objective constraints. In the Likud mind-set, the dialectical relationship between

peace and security is turned on its head, with security coming before peace. Indeed, peace is seen as a worthy aim only to the extent that it can reinforce security, and it was Netanyahu's accusation that Peres' vision of peace would compromise Israel's security that led to the latter's defeat at the polls.

Seen through a security prism, Netanyahu's recent proposal to move Lebanon up from its original position at the bottom of the peace talk agenda to the number one position when the peace talks resume makes perfect sense. For Lebanon is the Achilles' heel of Israel's security, and in a logic dominated by the security imperative, should be given priority even over Syria.

The same lay behind the Gaza-first option. With the Intifada making the continued presence of Israeli occupation forces untenable, Gaza was fast becoming a serious security liability. Heikal reports that Robin admitted to Mitterrand at the time that he would like to be rid of Gaza at any price. Jericho was dangled as a bait to make the offer more palatable to the Palestinians, who were in effect being asked to accept a piecemeal deal at the expense of an integral Palestinian entity. It seems the Lebanon-first option is a variation on the same theme. Israel has everything to gain in getting out of southern Lebanon, provided watertight security arrangements are set in place and Syria accepts the principle of negotiations with Israel prior to the latter's acceptance of the land-for-peace principle.

But even as we draw comparisons between 1977 and 1996, we should be aware of an important distinction between the two moments, namely, that Sadat was the first to engage in overt negotiations with the Israelis, while Assad is the last key actor required to follow the same path. A basic difference exists in the bargaining position of the two leaders. The first could afford not to set pre-conditions on the grounds that his initiative had to be rewarded, while the last, on whom the conclusion of a comprehensive peace deal hinges, is in a position to demand a counterpart in advance. As Assad and Netanyahu play chicken, the outcome will depend on which of the two protagonists will give in first.

## Attentive readers

**Close up**

Salama A. Salama

**Chemical imbalance**

There is nothing strange in Egypt's refusal to sign the chemical arms ban treaty which prohibits the development, manufacture, and stockpiling of chemical weapons and commits signatories to the destruction of any chemical weapons they already hold. The Egyptian position — that it is pointless to commit oneself to prohibiting particular classes of weapons when other parties are permitted to possess weapons with a far greater destructive capability — has always been very clear.

Israel's refusal to sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty or to allow international inspectors access to its nuclear installations is well known. Israel's intransigence on this point was the root cause of the sharp differences that emerged last year between Egypt and the US and remains a major stumbling block in Egyptian-Israeli relations.

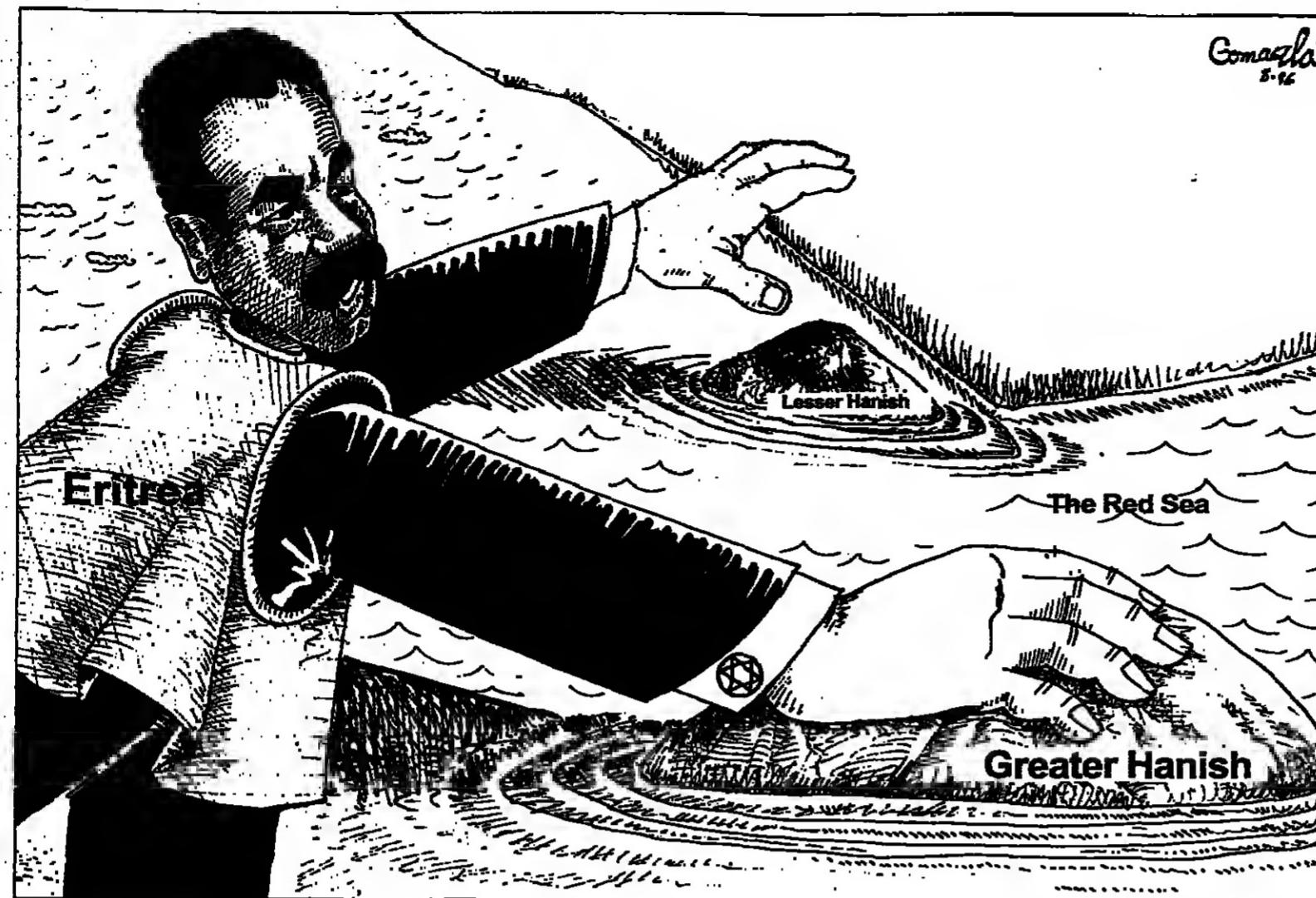
Egypt finds it illogical, in view of the current security imbalance in the Middle East and the enormous disparity in military capabilities, to forfeit its right to possess chemical weapons while Israel's nuclear arsenal remains exempt from all restrictions. Egypt also holds that developing countries should not be denied the peaceful use of chemical materials in their civilian industries.

Although the Egyptian position is in the interests of all Arab countries, and in the end is part of the larger desire to see the Middle East become an area free of all weapons of mass destruction, a number of other Arab countries, pressured by the US, rushed to sign the chemical arms ban treaty. The US and Russia, possessors of the largest chemical weapons stockpiles in the world, have themselves yet to ratify the treaty, which makes US pressure on others to do so seem rather less than seemly.

The treaty has a quorum of 63 signatures. The most recent signatory, Saudi Arabia, was number 61. It will not, therefore, be long before the treaty comes into effect since only four more signatures are needed. And when it does come into effect the chemical arms ban treaty will reinforce rather than correct the imbalance.

The nuclear test ban treaty, currently being negotiated in Geneva, looks set to cause as many problems as the chemical weapons treaty. Negotiations are at the moment stalled because India supported by Pakistan, Egypt and Iran, maintains that the treaty should contain a time-table for the five great powers to dismantle their own nuclear arsenals. After all, it is hardly reasonable that the entire world be expected to sign a treaty that sanctions a nuclear monopoly.

The implication of all this, in short, is that as long as international disarmament policies persist in favouring some countries at the expense of others, then those nations which feel they are being unfairly discriminated against will continue to consolidate their autonomous defence capacities.

**Soapbox****Intifada in Jerusalem?**

Israel's withdrawal from several large, densely populated Palestinian cities was motivated by a desire to protect its troops from the Intifada there. After the uprising began in 1987, Israeli leaders decided that no troops should be maintained in areas heavily populated by Palestinians.

Jerusalem is the largest city in the Occupied Territories. Israel, intransigent regarding withdrawal, claims it as its eternal capital and is therefore attempting to reduce the Arab (Muslim and Christian) population, making the city overwhelmingly Jewish.

The total population of Jerusalem is estimated at 550,000 — 390,000 Jews in East and West Jerusalem, and 160,000 Arabs in East Jerusalem. The Arab population has been halved, yet those who remain, suffering under economic and political embargoes, continue to resist Israel's attempts to expel them. They feel that Jerusalem, the capital of Palestine and the heart of its commercial and cultural life, is their city. But Israel has sealed off roads leading to the city; Palestinians, including those wishing to worship at Al-Aqsa Mosque, may no longer enter. Access is allowed only to those holding permits.

Netanyahu has pushed through a policy aimed at isolating the Palestinian inhabitants of Jerusalem. He sought to obliterate Palestinian identity, leaving the population with no choice but to renew the Intifada. The new insurgents, however, will be better trained in both violent and non-violent means of resistance.

Direct causes of friction are numerous. The extremists have previously attempted to break into Al-Aqsa Mosque, and are still attempting to do so. Jewish fundamentalists have opened fire on Muslim worshippers. Particularly if Netanyahu persists provoking the Palestinians, Jerusalem may soon become the scene for the next Palestinian Intifada.



**Mahgoub Omar**

This week's soapbox speaker is a columnist specialised in Palestinian affairs with the opposition Al-Shaab.

**Islamists tread softly in Turkey**

**What more could Necmettin Erbakan ask for? Not only does he head Turkey's most popular, even most powerful party, writes Eric Rouleau; recently, he has also become the first Islamist to lead the government of the Kemalist republic**

Kemal Ataturk was probably spinning in his grave when he heard the news — this is rumoured in Istanbul or Ankara's "secular" salons. An Islamist head of government? Following the first world war, the founder of the Turkish republic battled — or eradicated, as they say today — clericalism, until Islam was uprooted (so he thought) from Anatolian soil. A fervent admirer of the French Revolution, he believed — rightly so — that the dismantling of the Ottoman Empire's worn-eaten structures necessitated the marginalisation of the religious institution. The excesses of this battle sometimes resembled a witch-hunt, to the extent that such-and-such a high-ranking government employee or officer could be suspected, even punished, if it was discovered that he was a practicing Muslim.

This gives an idea of what persistence it took Necmettin Erbakan to introduce, maintain and legitimise Islamist ideology on the Turkish political scene. For thirty years, the German-trained engineer proved, not only to his competitors but also to the ruling élites, that his movement — which was forced to adopt different labels due to successive interdictions — was indispensable to the proper functioning of the pluralist democracy born in the aftermath of the second world war. Most importantly, he had to convince his party colleagues that, in return, the republican constitution and state secularism had to be scrupulously respected, the principle of the rotation of power accepted. This canny politician thus brought off a tour de force: that of acceding twice, in the '70s, to the functions of vice-premier, first in a government led by Bulent Ecevit, a social-democrat, then in a right-wing ministry led by the current head of state, Suleyman Demirel.

This is not to say that Necmettin Erbakan has won his bet. The secular élites have mixed feelings, to say the least, towards him. Despite his airs of a kindly grandfather, this seventy-year-old with a cherubic face and white hair, eyes twinkling with bonhomie and malicious verve, inspires distrust and fear in those who see in him the diabolical artisan of a totalitarian state. Writer Ali Simen, for instance, recalls that Hitler, too, was elected to power. Sociologist Nuhfer Gole, on the other hand, feels that this parallel is unfounded, and argues that an Islamist integrated into political life is better than a terrorist lurking in the shadows.

Instead of indulging in fruitless suppositions or hypotheses which it would be equally impossible to verify, it would be more useful to examine the factors which have lent political Islam, and the Refah (Welfare) Party, led by Erbakan, its impetus. Despite their attachment to Islam, the Turks gave only seven per cent of their votes to this party in 1987. Eight years later, in December 1995, this score — counted during equally free elections tripled, reaching 21 per cent of the ballots cast, and making the Refah Turkey's first party. The reasons for this success are so similar as to be almost identical to those which contributed to the rise of Islamists elsewhere in the world: a persistent national crisis leading to popular discontent, and the inability of either the régime or the traditional parties to put forth a credible solution. Iran under the Shah and Algeria under the FLN illustrate this statement.

The crisis specific to Turkey is multi-faceted: the unending Kurdish conflict, a confused national identity, economic inequalities which have fed a profound social malaise, democratic regression — all these have contributed a discrediting part of the ruling class, whether right- or left-wing — to the advantage of an opposition which presents itself as both an ideological (Islam) and a political alternative. Closely reading the Refah's programme and statements, one concludes that this party is attempting to replace both a faltering left and a right which should have paid more attention to the interests of the poor and middle bourgeoisie. It would further seek to dislodge the nationalists in defending the interests of "the Muslim" against the hegemonic ambitions of foreign powers. In other words, it presents itself as a catch-all.

Erbakan's group promises the re-establishment of civil peace by offering the Kurds equal rights, not only as citizens (which the republican system already guarantees), but also as an ethnic community, something which Kemalism (and, incidentally, French Jacobinism) challenges

even as a concept. Nor daring to offer these additional rights — in contravention of the Constitution — the Refah refers to "Islamic brotherhood", to the autonomy enjoyed under the millet system during the Ottoman caliphate. "Islam unifies, (secular) nationalism divides!" proclaims the party banner. And to attract those suffering from the authorities' intolerance, especially in the repression of the Kurdish autonomists, Erbakan recently declared: "If we manage to put together a coalition government, our two main objectives will be to defend democracy and human rights." The reference was straightforward enough to induce a good part of the Kurdish masses to vote for the Islamists — even when the Kurdish nationalist party, the HADEP, was on the lists.

On the social front, the Refah presents itself as the defender of the dispossessed, just as Imam Khomeini once made himself the champion of the *motaqqin*, those who had been left out. Erbakan's party may well denounce chronic inflation — averaging around 100 per cent a year over the past decade — the notable decrease in the purchasing power of salaried workers, especially millions of government employees, and high rates of unemployment, all of which add fuel to the fire of social tensions. If we are to believe the Islamist group, economic management should be radically overhauled. While in favour of the market economy, the Refah advocates a protectionist policy intended both to save national enterprises from the "greed of the foreign powers", and — ultimately — to defend the gains of Kemalism, notably "national industry". Hence the Refah's opposition to the privatisation of most state enterprises, hence also its denunciation of the conditions imposed on Turkey when it was admitted, last December, to the European Community's customs union; hence, also, the call for the creation of an "Islamic union" similar to the latter and aimed at countering the industrial power groupings. If the Refah avoids using such terms as "Third World", "foreign monopolies", "imperialism" or "national identity", the content of its programme — beneath the Islamic veneer — echoes the ideology and slogans of the post-war Third World movements.

Nor does the Refah condemn the "comprador bourgeoisie" and proclaim itself the defender of the "national bourgeoisie", clichés which, in its view, are stained with Marxist rhetoric, but it has presided over the creation of an Islamist association, grouping mainly the heads of small and medium firms — no doubt in a bid to contend with TUSIAD, which represents the heavy-weight bosses, is linked with foreign capital, and is, furthermore, determinedly secular. In counterpart, as it were, the Refah has set itself the task of attracting labour's sympathies, first through the intermediary of a trade union federation, based on "Islamic values", and secondly by putting forth claims which are sometimes more radical than those formulated by traditional unions, whether left or right-wing.

Workers and bosses, but also women, students, the medical profession, engineers and lawyers are organised to defend the "Islamic" principles of social justice and equality. Thanks to the systematic creation of a comprehensive social grid, its style reminiscent of that once used by Marxist groups, the Refah is no doubt the party most strongly rooted in Turkish society. Cited as proof, among other items: the remarkable network of women's rights organisations, its remote-controls, reputedly the most active and influential in the country. The progress

achieved by the Islamist group in recent years, then, especially in the local and municipal elections held in March 1994, should come as no surprise. These successes assured its control of numerous cities, including Ankara, the capital, and Istanbul, the megalopolis.

The Islamists' performance in the urban agglomerations has been positive, on the whole. Thus far, it has shown integrity; none of the scandals which marked some of the secular candidates have embarrassed it. The vast majority of mayors and municipal counsellors have respected the convictions and mores of their electorate. In Istanbul, for instance, a cosmopolitan city par excellence, the mayor has not imposed the veil; nor has he forbidden the consumption of alcohol, or closed nightclubs where the shows could well be judged indecent or offensive to Islamic morality. Of course, such measures would be against the republican constitution. But, making a virtue of necessity, Necmettin Erbakan consistently repeated, during his time as a member of the opposition, that Islam does not allow intervention in the private life of Muslims, that secularism as it is "interpreted" in Turkey is contrary to civil freedoms, and that the Refah would much prefer "the state's neutrality regarding religion", following the example of France or the United States.

This should do much to reassure those who ardently advocate the separation of church and state, including the high-level armed forces hierarchy, which portrays itself as the guardian of the Kemalist republic. This prudence is also eminently appropriate with respect to Turkey's traditional allies, led by the US. Criticism of US policy is consistently brought down to acceptable levels. Of course, the Refah always blames NATO for replacing the communist enemy by the "Islamist threat", and therefore calls for Atlantic policy to be re-oriented, without explicitly suggesting that Turkey quit the Western alliance. Erbakan's party, however, concerned with defending the national interest, does call for an end to Operation "Provide Comfort" — in other words, for the withdrawal of US, French and British forces responsible for protecting the autonomous Kurdish provinces of northern Iraq. The Islamist party has thereby minimised the risks, several other political groups, fearing the potential domino effect of an autonomous Kurdish entity rooted at the western borders of Anatolia, have made the same demand.

The Islamists' attitude towards the European Community is equally ambivalent. The Refah criticises the EC, not only because it has refused the integration of "Muslim" Turkey, but because of its "rich boys' club" mentality. It is favourable to an Islamic common market, but is still careful not to rule out its eventual membership to the union, if Turkey were able to obtain favourable conditions. Here again, Islamist opposition converges with the stands taken by secular nationalists, without however breaking with a national consensus amenable to the country's entry into the Community.

The equanimity with which the US received the news of government led by Erbakan cannot be explained only by his relatively moderate positions. Washington trusts Tansu Ciller, the leader of the Straight Path Party, who has taken on the foreign affairs portfolio, the members of her party, who received the key ministries of interior and defense, and, above all, the general armed forces staff. Essentially, the US trusts the loyalty of the Turkish senior officers, their attachment to the Atlantic alliance, and their determination to preserve the republic's secular character. In any case, the US could not

decently have opposed the ballot boxes' democratic verdict. One may also speculate that the Americans, just like the traditional Turkish parties, are not adverse to giving the Islamists a trial run in power.

Necmettin Erbakan must now pick up a formidable gauntlet, and advance simultaneously along two tracks while avoiding any pitfalls: he must, on one hand, satisfy the establishment élites, clean up the economy at minimal cost, apply a foreign policy in conformity with the wishes of the Western powers and, especially, fulfil the expectations of his popular electorate, which do not correspond to those of the "haves" and the conformists. These aspirations are equal to the promises that have been made. Yet these promises have already been broken. Erbakan had vowed to defend human rights, but he let a dozen hunger strikers, protesting against prison conditions, die at the end of July. The minister of justice, himself an eminent member of the Refah, was the most intractable on this issue. He shocked many when he declared, for instance, that the sinister Eskisehir prison was equivalent to a "luxurious five-star hotel".

Everything also indicates that Kurds who bet on the Refah's victory will also be disappointed. It would be difficult to challenge the national consensus supported by the army, on the struggle against the autonomous guerrillas of the PKK. This war, which dares not speak its name, has cost the state more than eight billion dollars a year, and is blocking the very same economic development for which the various "technical" ministries of the Refah are responsible. One of the reasons which led Ciller to let these portfolios go to the Islamists is her conviction that Erbakan's friends will fail to carry off the main balancing acts: cutting inflation and unemployment, bringing purchasing power up — basically, achieving the principal part of their programme. "The coalition will collapse... and general elections will take place early, in the coming nine or twelve months," predicts Icin Celebi, one of the moderate right's more prominent figures, among many others.

The Refah's inability to change foreign policy orientations is just as obvious. It is clear that Turkey's membership to NATO and the customs union of the European Community will not be challenged. Regarding Greece and Cyprus, Erbakan will be at least as intransigent as his predecessors. He will not risk the prestige he acquired in the eyes of the population and, especially, those of the army, when he appeared as one of the most persistent advocates of Turkish military intervention in Cyprus in 1974, during his spell as vice-premier in Bulent Ecevit's government. His stand on Israel will be even more delicate. Pro-Arab, anti-Zionist, he is one of the very few Turkish politicians to have opposed the recent military agreement between Turkey and the Jewish state. Since his accession to power, silence has been on the agenda, and it seems more than likely that the Refah will no longer dare to contest an agreement desired, negotiated and concluded by the high-ranking armed forces hierarchy. Supreme irony: at the beginning of August, the Islamist deputies voted, as one man, that the mandate of Operation "Provide Comfort"'s allied forces be renewed for five more months.

Did Necmettin Erbakan make a fatal mistake in insisting on a share in power? Some of his friends had urged him against it, emphasising — with good reason — the fact that by remaining in the opposition, Refah could make new and substantial progress, maybe even such a majority in the coming parliament, as would allow it to make up the government alone.

The old Islamist leader probably felt that this perspective was a dangerous one. It would make so many waves, both at home and abroad, that it might incite the army to take power "to save the republic". Erbakan may have preferred, again, the longer, safer path: by imposing the presence of Islamist ministers, he has legitimised the Refah as a government party, and allowed his partisans to take over core positions in the administration, while blaming his coalition partners for his failures. What matter if the Refah obtains an absolute majority in the next parliament? He will have guaranteed its future. Erbakan, despite his age, is in no hurry.

*The writer is a senior political analyst and former French ambassador to Turkey.*

**To The Editor****Oslo dispute**

Sir - Last week, Graham Usher reported from Jerusalem that PLO leader Yasser Arafat denounced the Israeli cabinet decision to end the freeze on settlements as it is a violation of the Oslo Accords (*Al-Ahram Weekly*, 15-21 August).

Actually, the cabinet's decision does not violate any provision of the accords. By fabricating an Oslo Accord provision and successfully promoting it, the Palestinians may doom the peace process.

Joseph Lerner  
Director, Independent Media Review  
Jerusalem

**The spirit of sports**

Sir - The Paralympic Games in Atlanta this week already promise to be a much more inspiring event than the commercialised games that left Atlanta earlier this month. The spirit of sport was lost amidst the media hype surrounding the recently concluded Centennial Games. Instead of lasting images of athletic accomplishments, the international press bombarded audiences with commercial coverage.

Sadly, those participating in the Paralympic games are not afforded the same attention as cologne bottles.

Michel Labib  
Helipolis

**Classified ads**

Sir - As a foreign resident in this wonderful city, I consider myself fortunate to have found *Al-Ahram Weekly*. It provides interesting, in-depth reporting, not only on world issues, but also on many important local concerns. Your reporters have a knack for getting at the heart of political and cultural issues, relaying how they affect Egypt as a whole. The "Popcorn" and travel sections often attest to the wonderful sense of humour displayed by your journalists.

Having said this, I feel I must point out a place where I feel you could really improve your newspaper as a whole. As a

non-Arab speaker, I have found a serious lack of useful classified sections available in English here in Egypt. I think it would help your readership considerably if you provided this service. There are many foreign residents living in Cairo who, when looking for an apartment, car or other amenities would be very relieved to find them advertised in your publication.

Beth Miles  
Zamalek

**Where is Zeld?**

Sir - I have been following *Al-Ahram Weekly*'s excellent coverage of the Nasr

Hamed Abu Zeid case for the past year. But I was rather surprised to find that only a week after the Court of Cassation upheld the lower court's divorce verdict, the issue seemed to have completely disappeared from the *Weekly's* pages.

In my opinion, ignoring the issue is not the best way to deal with it. Your newspaper should have continued to unravel the complicated aspects of the verdict, its significance and legal consequences. Furthermore, you should have probed into the depths of the society which breeds such twisted minds as those who demanded the divorce in the first place.

Sohab Sadek  
Social researcher  
Nasr City

**We can't breathe!**

Sir - I was disturbed by your article "A public haze" (*Al-Ahram Weekly* 15-21 August). I am aware, as anyone who walks outside in the morning is, of the terrible pollution in our city. What surprised me was the extent to which we have violated ALL the international standards for air pollution. With our considerable knowledge of the environment and scientists developing new and better ways of filtering harmful components from the air we breathe, there is no excuse for endangering our lives and more importantly, those of our children.

Jihan Fahmy  
Bar El-Louk

# All the world on stage

It seems that pride in numbers has become a permanent feature of CIFET. Heedless of the advice to exercise more discretion in the choice of productions and go for quality, the Festival's organising committee is boasting no less than 63 shows this year. These come from 53 different countries, and since every production plays twice, at least, the number of performances, not counting the Egyptian contribution, will total well over 120. In real terms, this means that no single critic can cover the whole event from start to finish; that theatre enthusiasts will be kept frantically rushing between the 20 venues available to the festival from practically mid-day until well after midnight; and that the members of the international jury will be literally worked off their feet. Last year, one member of the jury could not take the strain of watching five performances a day and collapsed mid-way through the festival; this year, the nominated head of the jury, Samir Sarhan (a playwright and the chairman of the General Egyptian Book Organisation) courteously declined the honour on the advice of his heart-doctor. For lack of an equally prestigious Egyptian 'public personality', Fawzi Fahmi, the chairman of the festival, nominated the US member of the jury as head. Fortunately, the US jury member happens to be a woman; otherwise, the decision would have carried dangerous political implications and seemed to assert the supremacy of the Coca-Cola and hamburger culture. As it is, it seems a feminist thrust in favour of female judgement in theatre matters and a well-calculated preamble to next year's CIFET which, according to Dr. Fahmi, will be dedicated to women's theatre.

In this year's festival, women cut a high profile. Several productions are directed, collaboratively devised, or completely (wo)manned by women, and five shows at least are constructed out of voyaging into their 'no man's land' experiences. From Sophocles's *Electra* (Greece), via the Ukrainian Odessa Experimental theatre's *Dreams of Cleopatra*, through Edith Braun's Austrian *Titania* (a phantom portrait in movement about Elizabeth, Austr-Hungarian empress, and down to Eugen O'Neill's *Mourning Becomes Electra* (Portugal); Lithuania's *Life of Edith Piaf*, Belarus's *Woman to Be Loved by You*, based on the book *The Tragedy of Marilyn Monroe*, Malaysia's *A Modern Woman*, Switzerland's *The Woman of the Dune*, Germany's Elvira Schuring's *Solo*, and the US, Seattle-based Ah Ha Na ensemble's *Live Acts of Love* (which features the love lives of five women), you can be sure to have a belly-full of women's theatre.

To counter-balance this feminist

## Music

### More than rude

**David Blake** is blown by the wrong wild wind

Blown by the wind

photo: Sherif Sombol

forming area without any accompaniment at all.

The voice of Allouba came through space, without any piano accompaniment. Then the thunder came and everything was gone: voice, piano, orchestra, the lot. The amplifier is having its fun with the concertos. One might as well leave. The thunder is serious — no more music tonight. This state of affairs seems to bother some more than others. The small open air area of the open house can somehow survive. Its position is more sheltered. But the Saadieh Citadel presents huge problems: if all is expected of this place is an audience half-conscious of the true purpose of the area, kids prancing about on the chairs in imitation belly-dance, then Citadel is doing well. If some form of practical, serious musical enjoyment is to be had from it, then it is a failure — a circus in the sky without diabolos. No musically respectable eagle would be caught dead in this place.

And so there is this Citadel; as prestigious as any pyramid, soaked in history atop the glittering jungle of Cairo beneath, offering nothing but thunder and odd items of deformed musical noise. Is this enough for the civil dignity of Cairo?

This area can be saved — at a huge cost. The Albert Hall in London had acoustic problems, the Hollywood Bowl also. Luxor is protected by the mountains behind it. Only the ancient Greeks solved the problem of outdoor acoustics. A pebble dropped on the stage of the Herod Atticus Theatre in Athens can be heard from the highest seats in the auditorium, and always the subtleties of Callas's *Norma* were projected. So the Greeks had a way with such things. But the vast proscenium area of the Citadel with its backdrop of ancient walls and towers needs 1990s technology, and a Maecenas who will put it onto the international stage. Perhaps Claes Oldenburg could create a vast plastic fan across the gash between the towers that would solve the problem.

She did a foot-soldier's slog at the keys, determined to be heard and make a correct impression. This was, after all, one of the big party pieces of the piano repertoire. Some hopes for the party. What she had to cope with was a war situation. She brought it off heroically but the betting is she will never forget her Rachmaninov 2 up there in cloudland. Continuity is lost when the piece being performed is mostly missing. Even the certainty of what is being played is lost.

The pieces played at the Citadel are usually repeated at the Open House's Open Air theatre. The latter is endurable if the wind is not strong — if strong near the amplifier, with its thun-

derous attack of wind, it was clear that conductor and orchestra were doing a good job in a nasty situation. But Akensten's best efforts were smudged.

Then came the second piano concerto of Rachmaninov, first movement only. There was, in any case, little use doing the other two since we hardly heard the first. And it took the unfortunate pianist, Nibal Mounib, longer to get herself sorted out on missing piano stool, flying music manuscripts and some much needed dusting up of the keys than it did to play the whole piece.

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# The unquiet American

The New York Times' reporter Judith Miller has written a book on the Middle East under the title *God Has Ninety-Nine Names*. Confusions arise, though, writes Edward Said, from the fact that, as an expert, she still cannot read even one

**GOD HAS  
NINETY-  
NINE  
NAMES**

JUDITH MILLER

Judith Miller is a New York Times reporter much in evidence on talk shows and seminars on the Middle East; her new, approximately 600-page book is *God Has Ninety-Nine Names: Reporting from a Militant Middle East*. She trades in "the Islamic threat," as a Foreign Affairs symposium to which she contributed had it in 1993; her particular mission has been to advance the millennial thesis that militant Islam is a danger to the West, an idea that is also the core of Samuel Huntington's clash of civilizations doctrine.

So in the supposed intellectual vacuum created by the Soviet Union's dismemberment, the search for a new foreign devil has come to rest, as it did beginning in the 8th century for European Christendom, on Islam, a religion whose physical proximity and un stellt challenge to the West (a vague term that denotes "our" civilisation as opposed to "theirs") seems as diabolical and violent now as it did then. Never mind that most Islamic countries today are poverty-stricken, tyrannical, and hopelessly inept militarily as well as scientifically; to be much of a threat to anyone except their own citizens; and never mind that the most powerful of them are totally within the US's orbit. What matters to "experts" like Miller, Huntington, Martin Kramer, Bernard Lewis, Daniel Pipes, Steven Emerson, Barry Rubin, plus a whole battery of Israeli academics, is to make sure that the "threat" is kept before our eyes, the better to exorcise Islam for its terror, despotism, and violence, while assuring themselves profitable consultancy, frequent TV appearances, and book contracts. To a basically indifferent and already poorly informed American clientele the Islamic threat is made to seem disproportionately fearsome, lending support to the thesis (which is an interesting parallel to anti-Semitic paranoias) that there is a world-wide conspiracy behind every explosion.

Political Islam has generally been a failure wherever it has tried through Islamist parties to take state power. Iran is a possible exception, but neither Sudan, which is in fact an Islamic state, nor Algeria, riven by the contest between Islamic groups and a brutal soldiery, has done anything but make itself poorer and more marginal on the world stage. Linking beneath the discourse of Islamic peril in the West is, however, some measure of truth, which is that appeals to Islam among Muslims have fuelled resistance (in the style of what Eric Hobsbawm has called primitive, pre-industrial rebellion), here and there to the Pax Americana-Sachsen throughout the Middle East. Yet neither Hezbollah nor Hamas has presented a serious obstacle to the ongoing steam-roller of the anything-but-peace process. I would say that most Arab Muslims today are too disengaged and humiliated, and also too anaesthetised by uncertainty and their incompetent and crude dictatorships, to support anything like a vast Islamic campaign against the West. Besides, the elites are for the most part in cahoots with the regimes, supporting martial-law plus various other effective extra-legal measures against "extremists."

Why then the accents of alarm and fear in most Western discussions of Islam? Of course there have been suicide bombings and outrageous acts of terrorism, but have these accomplished anything except to strengthen the hand of Israel and the US as well as their client regimes in the Muslim world?

The answer, I think, is that books like Miller's are important in that they furnish an additional weapon in the contest to subordinate, beat down, compel and defeat any Arab or Muslim resistance to US-Israeli dominance. Moreover by surreptitiously justifying a policy of single-minded obduracy that links Islamism, however lamentable it is, to a strategically important oil-rich part of the world, the anti-Islam campaign virtually eliminates the possibility of any sort of equal dialogue between Islam and the Arabs on the one hand, and the West or Israel on the other. To demonise and dehumanise a whole culture on the grounds that it is (in Lewis's sneering phrase) enraged at modernity is to turn Muslims into the objects of a therapeutic, primitive attention. I do not want to be misunderstood here: the manipulation of Islam, or for that matter Christianity and Judaism, for retrograde political purposes is catastrophically bad, and must be universally opposed, not just in the Eastern Arab world, Pakistan, Sudan, Algeria, Tunisia, but also in Israel, among the right-wing Christians in Lebanon (for whom Miller shows an unseemly sympathy), and wherever theocratic tendencies appear. And I do not at all believe that all the ill of Arab Muslim countries are due to Zionism and imperialism. But this is very far from saying that Israel is a secular, liberal democracy. Miller says unctuously at the end of her book that right-wing Judaism in Israel is "the subject of another book." It ought actually to be very much a part of the book that she has written, except that she has willfully suppressed it in order to go after "Islam".

Writing about any other religion or part of the world Miller would be considered woefully unqualified. She tells us on numerous occasions that she has been involved with the Middle East as a professional for 25 years, yet she has no knowledge of either Arabic or Persian; she admits that wherever she goes she needs a translator whose accuracy or reliability she has no way of assessing. It would be impossible to be taken seriously as a reporter or expert on Russia, France, Germany, Latin America, perhaps even China and Japan, without knowing the requisite language, but for "Islam" the absence of any linguistic knowledge seems to be acceptable since what one is dealing with is considered to be a psychological deformation, not a "real" culture or religion.

Most sources she cites in her pages of footnotes are tainted by her ignorance, whether because she can only cite the things she already knows she wants in English, or because she quotes authorities whose views correspond to hers. An entire library by Muslims, Arabs and non-Oriental scholars is therefore closed to her. Nearly every time she tries to impress us with her ability to say a phrase or two in Arabic she unerringly gets it wrong. These are fairly common, but by no means rare, mistakes; and her mistakes are not just errors of translation, which she laboriously forgives herself for at the book's start. They are gross, crude mistakes committed by a foreigner who neither has the care nor the respect for her subject that after 25 years earning a living out of it she might have taken the trouble to acquire.

If her attempt to understand the detail of Arab/Islamic life are so unsuccessful, what then of her political and historical information? Each of the ten country chapters (Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, etc.) begins with an anecdote and moves immediately to a potted history of the place which reflects — I am being charitable — not much more than the work of a name-dropping college

sophomore. Cobbled together out of various, not always reliable authorities, these histories are meant principally to display her command of the material, but actually expose her lamentable prejudices and failures of analysis and comprehension. In the Saudi Arabia chapter, for instance, she informs us in a note that her "favourite" source on the Prophet Muhammad is the French Orientalist Maxime Rodinson, a redoubtable Marxist scholar whose biography of the Prophet is written with a bracing combination of anti-clerical irony and enormous crudity. What Miller gets from this in her 4 or 5 page summary of Muhammad's life and ideas is that there is something inherently visible, if not contemptible about the man whom Rodinson says was a combination of Charlemagne and Jesus Christ; for whereas Rodinson understands what that means, Miller tells us (irrelevantly) that she is not convinced. For her Muhammad is the begetter of an anti-Jewish religion, one that is faced with violence and paranoia. She does not quote one Muslim source on Muhammad and relies completely on the dyspeptic debunking of Western Orientalists; just imagine a book published in the US on Jesus or Moses that makes no use of a single Judaic or Christian authority. It couldn't be done.

"After he conquered Mecca, Muhammad reportedly only killed ten people for their affronts to him and Islam," she says with a pathetic effort at sarcasm. She justifies her attention to Muhammad by reminding us that he founded a religion and a state (the observation is not original) but then jumps from the seventh century to roughly the present, as if the founders of states in the distant past are the best sources for present day history.

One is never allowed to forget then that Miller is basically a tendentious, politically motivated reporter, and neither a scholar nor an expert, nor even a coherent writer, since most of her book is made up not of argument and ideas but of interminable interviews with what seems to be a slew of soundlessly, pathetically, unconvinced, self-serving Muslims and their occasional critics. Once we are past her little histories we are soon adrift in the most boring, unstructured meandering which testify to an over-filled Rolodex rather than to her genuine knowledge of the place. Here's a typical sentence of resoundingly insubstantial generalisation: "And Syrians, mindful of their country's chaotic history (incidentally, for what country on earth is this not also true?) found the prospect of a return to monarchy or yet another prolonged, bloody power struggle [is that uniquely true of Syria as a post World War II post-colonial state, or is it true of a hundred others like Syria in Asia, Africa, Latin America?] — and perhaps even the triumph of militant Islam in the most secular [with what thermometer did she get that reading?] state — alarming."

Leave aside the abominable diction and jaw-shattering jargon of the writing. What you have is not an idea at all, but a series of clichés mixed with unverifiable assertions that reflect the "thought" of "Syrians" much less than they do Miller's.

Miller glides her paper-thin descriptions with the phrase "my friend", which she uses to convince her reader that she really knows the people and consequently what she is talking about. I counted no less than 247 uses of the phrase before I stopped counting, halfway through the book. It is as if she believes that her "friends" tell her intimate things that only she has been able to pry out of them. But this technique produces extraordinary distortions in the form of long digressions that testify to an Islamic mind-set, even as they obscure or ignore more, or at least equally relevant, material like local politics, the functioning of secular institutions, the active in-



**'Miller, in short,  
is a shallow,  
opinionated  
journalist  
whose gigantic  
book is five  
hundred pages  
too long for  
what it ends up  
saying and five  
hundred pages  
too short on  
reflection,  
considered  
analysis,  
structure and  
facts'**

tellectual contest taking place between Islamists and nationalistic opponents. She seems never to have heard of Arikoun, or Jabri, or Tarabishi, or Adonis, or Hanafi, or Dajat, whose theses are hotly debated all over the Islamic world.

This appalling failure of knowledge and analysis is especially true in the chapter on Israel (misitled, since it is all about Palestine) where she ignores completely the changes caused by the intifada, the prolonged, detailed effect of the three-decade Israeli occupation, and conveys no sense of the abominations wrought on the lives of ordinary Palestinians by Oslo and Yasser Arafat's one-man rule. It is no coincidence that as a supporter of US policy Miller is more obsessed with Hamas than any one else is, and she is clearly unable to connect Hamas with the sorry state of affairs in territories run brutally by Israel for all these years. She neglects to mention, for instance, that the only Palestinian university not established with Palestinian funds is Gaza's Islamic (Hamas) University, started by Israel to undermine the PLO during the intifada. She records Muhammad's deportations against the Jews but has virtually nothing at all to say about Israeli beliefs, systems and laws against "non-Jews," often rabbinically sanctioned practices of deportation, killing, house demolition, land confiscation, outright annexation and what Sera Roy has called systematic economic development. In her breathlessly exten-

Asad's cruel and soulless regime. For if the daughter of such pillars of the Damascene bourgeoisie could succumb to the power of Islam, who was immune?

For someone as "friendly" as Miller, such snide accounts end up by trivialising and cheapening the people whose houses and privacy she has invaded. The most interesting question about Miller's book is why she wrote it at all. Certainly not out of affection. Consider, for instance, that she admires the fears and dislikes Lebanon, hates Syria, laughs at Libya, dismisses Sudan, feels sorry for and a little smirched by Egypt, is repulsed by Saudi Arabia, etc. She has not bothered to learn the language and is clearly and relentlessly only concerned with the dangers of organised Islamic militancy which I would hazard a guess accounts for less than five per cent of the billion-strong Islamic world. She is totally in favour of the violent suppression of Islamists (but not torture and other "illegal means" used in that suppression; the contradiction in her position seems to have escaped her notice), has no qualms at all about the absence of democratic practices or legal procedures in countries backed by the US, so long as Islamists are the target and, in one especially nauseating instance, she actually participates in the prison interrogation of an alleged Muslim terrorist by Israeli policemen, whose systematic use of torture and other questionable procedures (under-

cover assassinations, middle-of-the-night arrests, house demolition) she politely overlooks as she gets to ask the handcuffed man a few questions of her own.

Perhaps her greatest, most consistent failing as a journalist is that she is willing only to make connections and offer analyses of matters that suit her prevailing thesis about the militant, hateful quality of the Arab world. Now I have little quarrel with the general view that the Arab world is in a dreadful state, and have said so repeatedly in print for the past three decades. But she does not even give a minimally accurate picture of the role played in this mess by Israel and the US, and in fact scarcely registers the existence of a determined anti-Arab and anti-Islamic US policy (barring the Afghanistan episode which she mentions rather glibly in passing). Take Lebanon for example. She refers to Bashir Gemayel's assassination in 1982 and gives one impression that he was elected by a popular landslide. She simply does not even allude to the fact that he was brought to power while the Israeli army was in West Beirut, just before the Sabra and Shatila camp massacres, and that for years, according to Israeli sources like Uri Lubrani, was the Mosad's man in Lebanon. That he was a killer and a self-styled thug is also elided, as is the fact that Lebanon's current power structure is chock full of people like Elie Hobeika who was charged directly for the camp massacres.

In citing instances of Arab anti-Semitism she does not even note the existence of a horrendously racial discourse inside Israel directed against Arabs and Muslims. Israeli leaders like Begin, Shamir, Eitan, and more recently Ehud Barak have referred to Palestinians as two-legged beasts, grasshoppers, cockroaches, and mosquitoes, and have had the guns and tanks to prosecute them accordingly. One would have thought that a star reporter might have at least touched on these matters. As for the facts of Israel's wars against civilians, the protracted, consistent and systematic campaign against prisoners of war, refugee camp dwellers, village destruction, bombings of hospitals and schools, the deliberate creation of hundreds of thousands of refugees, all these are buried (if they are present at all) in realms of undefined, gushing praise.

Miller's problem at bottom is that she has a disdain for facts worthy of the airiest deconstructionist, but that she should prefer the interminable talk that she quotes as a way of turning Arabs into deserving victims of Israel's terror and US support of it says a lot about her as a perfect exemplification of the *New York Times'* current Middle East coverage, now at its lowest ebb.

In her lame, and pathetically confused conclusion she admits that her scolding may have been a little too harsh, though she does not inform us who appointed her to the position of official scold of the Arabs. She then puts it all down to her "love" of the region and its people. I cannot honestly think of a thing that she loves except perhaps her love. Not the "conformism" of Arab society she talks about, nor the ostentatious culinary display she says that the Arabs confuse with hospitality, not the language she has not learned, nor the people she so undermines and makes fun of, our the history and culture of a place which to her is one long tale of unintelligible sound and fury:

In a way one feels sorry for someone who is too blinded by linguistic and intellectual disabilities to enter into the life of a place, listen to its conversations directly, read its novels and plays on her own (as opposed to making friends with their authors), enjoy the energy and refinements of its social life, see its landscapes, appreciate its history and so forth. But that is the price paid for being a *Times* reporter in an age of sullen "expertise" and instant position-taking. You wouldn't know from Miller's book that there is a simmering inter-Arab conflict in interpretations and representations of the Middle East and Islam, and that, given her choice of sources, she is deeply partisan, an enemy of Arab nationalism which she declares dead numerous times in the book, a supporter of US policy, which has a lot to answer for, and a committed foe of any Palestinian nationalism that does not conform to the sanitised and harmless version foreseen, indeed programmatically planned for, in the Bannister's being set up according to the Oslo Accords.

Miller, in short, is a shallow, opinionated journalist whose gigantic book is five hundred pages too long for what it ends up by saying, five hundred pages too short on reflection, considered analysis, structure and facts. Poor Muslims and Arabs who may have trusted her, they should have known better than to mistake an insinuated guest for a friend.

*God Has Ninety-Nine Names: Reporting from a Militant Middle East*, Judith Miller, New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996. \$7.95 p

## Plain Talk

The British press is occupied these days with two important cultural events: the Promenade Concerts and the Edinburgh Festival. The latter celebrates its 50th birthday this year. These two events are, in my opinion, a gateway to the acquisition of a wide culture. Both have become landmarks of the international cultural calendar.

I had the luck to live through 12 years of these two events when I worked in London at a time of great change in world events. I had the good fortune to attend the first Edinburgh Festival in 1947. I was invited to that great occasion which, coming as it did after the Second World War, seemed to stand for civilised values in a world emerging from a shattering war. I remember the Vienna Philharmonic, the Comédie Française, together with leading British companies. And a remember, too, the great feelings of optimism, and of hope in the future, that bore the festival aloft on a tide of good will. It was almost as if the festival was the embodiment, the result, of the great, collective sigh of relief that came with the ending of the war.

It was amazing and heartening to see audiences, just recovering from the blitz, flocking to sample the rich banquet which the Edinburgh Festival offered. I remember with nostalgia and great affection watching Bruno Walter conducting Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde* with Kathleen Ferrier and Peter Pears. But the highlight of the event for me was a chat with TS Eliot during an interval in his play *Murder in the Cathedral*. We spoke, I recall, about the future of poetic drama.

And now, after 50 years, some critics seem to have lost confidence in the festival, wondering in fact if the fervour it generates has waned. True, Edinburgh still offers its waves of opera, music, drama and dance. But as the festival director Brian McMaster says, the structure may remain the same but the character of each particular festival depends partly on audience and partly on directorial tastes.

One innovation, introduced this year, is a series of lectures and background talks with artists. As Michael Billington puts it in the *Guardian*: "In 1947, audiences were hungry for ecstasy, now they crave enlightenment." The keynote address was itself given by George Steiner. Early leaks of his lecture suggested that it would be a withering attack on the in which the festival was heading. This proved not to be the case. Steiner offered gentle criticisms, suggesting in the end, that all the soul searching that had afflicted festival organisers was actually a good positive sign rather than a result of the festival heading in to some kind of crisis. It is only, Steiner suggested, through such constant self-examination that we can hope for any renewal in the arts.

Another new phenomenon at Edinburgh is the marked increase of fringes or experimental theatre. In 1947, six theatre companies made for an unofficial fringe; this year, there are 646 groups representing all the arts, making a total of 1,238 shows. A critic estimates that if all the fringe groups stood on each others' shoulders, they would reach the top of the world's tallest building and then continue another 14km into the air.

One characteristic of the fringe is that it has become an annual pilgrimage of dozens of university and college groups and a great many of the old fringe student types have now become stars. Indeed, the Edinburgh Festival fringe, with its vast number, and variety of shows, has become a kind of market for talent. Television and film companies send representatives every year to the festival, scouting for new faces, for the stars of tomorrow. Many shows, premiered at the festival, go on to transfer into mainstream theatres, even into London's West End.

For sometime now there have been voices calling for the festival to have more Scottish flavour. Many Scottish writers and artists claim that the festival offers little that is directly relevant to Scotland, which has become more than a venue rather than a participant. In future, though, the new director of the Edinburgh Festival has promised to address this imbalance. Which, of course, is a good thing. But let me hope that in emphasising a more local dimension that the festival does not lose sight of its international components. The Edinburgh Festival is, after all, the largest arts festival in the world, a massive celebration of the healing role of culture.

Mursi Saad El-Din

Will the changes shaking up state-owned TV be enough to keep viewers glued to the screen? Al-Ahram Weekly flips through the

# Small screen, big dreams

Tarek Atia takes on the TV Union's ambitious plans to electrify audiences

The new ads pumping upcoming programmes on Channel 1 are part of it. So is the Information Channel, on every night after Channel 2 goes to bed. The changes going on at state-owned Egyptian TV are all high profile.

Nile TV, *Good Morning Egypt* and its roving traffic reporters (who will now also be announcing violators' license plate numbers on the air), the late night anything goes talk shows, the CNN-inspired logos and theme music for summits and other big news events, and the healthy ration of music video "clips" that seems to be increasing daily, are all part of the TV Union's feverish attempts to catch up with the radically new world of TV.

It was inevitable. The satellite dish showed any Egyptian who had access just how exciting TV could be. The satellite invasion has inspired a tightening of standards all across the world. Catch up or give up is new world order's only rule.

If there was panic in the upper echelons of the TV business, it certainly did not stem from a fear of losing the virtual monopoly on entertainment in the country. By some estimates, 80 per cent of a household's prime evening entertainment is TV. No matter how many more people seem willing to save up for years, or share the cost of a dish with their neighbours for the privilege of saying "I no longer watch Egyptian TV", there will always be infinitely more who can only dream of it (and aren't all that interested in a bunch of channels they can't understand anyway).

So while most everybody will still be relegated to good old channels 1-9, the preponderance of new access to more and more forms of TV (decoders, and in a few years, cable) will probably remain the playground of the lucky few. But keep in mind those who can make the switch to satellite translate into those with buying power, the exact viewers that advertisers seek to target. If they don't watch Egyptian TV, advertisers may one day ask, why should we spend our good money (up to LE10,000 per minute) there? And it's advertising backs (by some estimates roughly LE80 million per month) that help keep the TV Union running.

But if you were to believe Issam Ismail, the man behind the flashy ads promoting upcoming programmes on Channel 1, the TV Union's new attitude is more one of benevolence rather than financial necessity. He insists that the changes do not stem from a fear of satellite switchover but are actually an honest attempt to provide viewers with far more exciting, and fulfilling fare.

"They deserve it," Ismail said, "and since we're becoming capable of giving it to them, it's our national duty to do so." Ismail spends almost all his waking hours at the TV building, holed up in what is gradually becoming a state-of-the-art studio, trying to make Egyptian TV faster and more user friendly. He spends copious amounts of time "worrying about how to make TV better", thinking of ways to replace the Channel 1 logo that appears on the upper left corner and the clock on the bottom right with a new, unified logo that fits better with the nature of the medium, for instance.

Ismail is one of the few brave innovators who are finally being supported by their superiors. He graduated from London University School of TV in 1985 and has been working at the TV building ever since. But it wasn't until his Channel 3 boss Aisha El-Bahrawi took over at Channel 1 that Ismail had the ultimate forum to show his stuff.

His slick, quick ads, slightly overbearing but highly effective mixtures of graphics, sound and scenes from upcoming movies and shows, have inspired video editors on other channels to pay more

attention to their work.

"They've always depended on the technology they get, without trying to adapt it to their own formats and needs," complains Ismail. Hence the meaningless logo sequences featuring billiard balls and lamp shades that explode into Channels 2 and 3.

When Ismail invented a new, catchy way to refer to the channel — *Alaa shashat il-oola* — literally on the number one screen — at first jealous colleagues accused him of trying to say Channel 1 was better than the rest. Perhaps, subconsciously,

TV you'll work there for free."

Trouble is, people aren't willing to do so anymore. That even goes for the celebrity guests Nasir and veteran host Samir Sabri to try to convince to appear on their show, entitled *This Evening*, every other week. At a recent meeting with El-Bahrawi, Sabri suggested paying the celebrities who come to the show — like the satellite channels do — as a sort of incentive. "That's why they're always not showing up. I invited 50 but only 10 came."

*This Evening* is another example of the TV Union's new attitude. The roving show takes its live audience to a different location every episode for a free-for-all song, dance and talk show extravaganza. Recent shows have been about the burdens of marriage and have featured a Sudanese *zaffa*, henna painting of guests, and a slight loosening of the boundaries of on-air uprightness.

At a recent taping, Sabri brought out a real-life bride and groom and asked the bride whether or not she had insisted her groom buy her this, that and the other thing before she agreed to the marriage. "I really shouldn't be saying this since we're on television and all," answered the blushing bride, "but he didn't need to get me anything more than a bed, and I would have gone anywhere with him."

Everyone in the audience wondered whether the bride's comment, as well as the subsequently candid dialogue between Sabri and the newlyweds, during which Sabri bluntly called the groom a virgin and the bride a bull (during a joke about their astrological signs), would survive Fathi Noseir's final cut. We all watched in anticipation as the award-winning show was aired two weeks later.

The fact that, in its entirety, it did, could have been a fluke, or else part of the overall attempt to make Egyptian television more interesting. Watching Egyptian television has always been a surreal — and often mind-numbingly inane — experience. Where else could you flip the channels only to find outrageously coiffed announcers asking bread-makers for solutions to cultural dilemmas, on channel after channel, for what seemed like hour after boring hour?

Critics and fed-up viewers have had a field day, citing copious amounts of programming that seems to have been carelessly lifted from the West without thought to content or cultural significance. Some mention the dichotomous nature of religious programming and back-to-back episodes of *The Bold and the Beautiful*. Or the way once a show becomes popular, it spawns a hundred mundane imitations. Even technically, the TV Union's output seems lost in their own medium. How else to explain the surreal half hours in the middle of prime time staring at a picture of a rose against a cardboard background and mood music while waiting for the next programme to start. Or not knowing whether the scripture in the paper — with its outrageously accurate-sounding 3:37, 10:46 starting times for programs — has been changed due to circumstances beyond anyone's control.

These days things are starting to look up in TV land. Still far from perfect, the new user-friendly attitude has made some visible inroads. The informative snippets across the bottom of the screen telling us all about the director, scriptwriter, etc., the multiple warnings when a program is about to be interrupted (for the call to prayer, the news, or a live feed), all may seem basic, but they've been a long time coming.

It's not easy overhauling a dinosaur, but the triple team headed by Information Minister Safwat El-Sharif, Head of the TV Union Soheir El-Itribi,



and Channel 1's El-Bahrawi are determined to get things moving in the right direction. El-Jurbi boasts new equipment and more opportunities for training courses abroad. Bahrawi is trying to raise the level of children's programming.

"What people don't realise is that the TV consists of several sectors that all feed their programmes into the TV Union," explains El-Bahrawi. El-Itribi and El-Bahrawi both spend inordinate amounts of time signing papers and handling tiny disputes relating to lighting budgets, etc. In addition to hosting their own weekly programmes, El-Itribi has eight phones on her desk, all of which sometimes ring at once. El-Bahrawi says "We're so busy all the time we don't tend to notice what people's reactions are. We're like the chef who's always cooking, cooking, cooking, but never gets to find out what the diners think of the food."

Noseir and many others who work for the TV Programming Sector complain of being tied down by the tremendous bureaucracy. Not enough studio time, too much competition from the better-funded Production Sector and their constant stream of drama far too many people who are slow to catch on that things have got to change. "This place is still 90 per cent bureaucrats," Noseir says. The last few months' efforts have been mildly effective, he says, but just a glance at his office, six desks crammed into a little room for some of the TV Union's oldest-serving production staff, is a clear indication of how tough the actual business of changing will be.

In spite of the constant stream of meetings, visitors and interruptions, El-Bahrawi and El-Itribi seem quite serious about trying to make a change. The attention El-Bahrawi pays to Sabri and No-

seir's crew about their problems and themes for the next show are part of the new hands-on attitude that El-Itribi claims didn't exist a year ago. Now there are daily meetings between herself and the heads of channels 1, 2 and 3. She's hoping the attitude will trickle down the TV Union's ladder. "The people who work here have to love it — it can't be just a job," El-Itribi says.

I asked El-Bahrawi what inspired the changes and she said "*al-qaroor*" (circumstances). Like wide-spread criticism in the press, for instance, about the lack of decent children's programming. Hence El-Bahrawi spends 10 minutes with Nader Abdel-Fattah, writer of a children's show, helping to choose an appropriate director, announcer, set designer, every little detail. "We'll win a prize, I promise you," she tells Abdel-Fattah.

El-Itribi responded to pressure from NGOs and literacy groups and now claims that TV is no longer just a forum for entertainment but has a serious role in solving national dilemmas. She cites well-produced public service ads, and illiteracy campaigns that turn the TV into a classroom for a national audience, with homework and market studies that test its efficacy.

El-Itribi is realistic: she knows that Egyptian TV is nowhere near the highly advanced state of the capitalist West, where Nielsen ratings tell producers and channel executives immediately whether a certain show was successful or not.

But not everything has to follow the Western model. As long as it's state-owned (and there are no plans for its privatisation) Egyptian TV will walk a more uncertain road, somewhere between the powers that be and that one small screen where all the world watches TV.

## Updating culture

Intellectuals charge that cultural programmes lack real culture while officials assure that new projects are being prepared to fill the gap. Rania Khallaf tunes in to the debate

"I rarely watch any cultural programmes because I find them superficial and boring," said Hassan Wagih, a professor at Al-Azhar University. In fact, the cultural programmes broadcast on the two main channels of official television are not only produced in an outdated format, but are also broadcast at entirely inappropriate times, he added.

Mohamed El-Hadidi, professor of mass communications at Cairo University, agrees. "This is very true. Most of these programmes are broadcast either after midnight or at noon, the time when most people are resting or having lunch," she noted.

Ahmed Mokhtar, an on-air announcer for Channel 1, admitted that the producers of cultural programmes are not interested in innovation. "In many cases we are not even given permission to employ computer graphics. We are treated as civil servants, not as entertainers," he said.

But television officials argue that the concept of cultural programmes has expanded to include areas other than music, theatre and cinema.

Hassan Hamed, director of Nile TV, said research has proven that audiences receive more cultural information from programming that is not traditionally formatted. A new cultural satellite channel, headed by Hassan Hamed, is also due to go on-air by the end of next year. "The main target of the new channel is to expand the space given to cultural programmes," Hamed said.

Aisha El-Bahrawi, director of Channel 1, pointed out that cultural programming accounts for more than 20 per cent of total broadcast hours and it no longer follows traditional formats: "About five years ago, cultural programmes were restricted to music, theater, and cinema. Today, the concept is different."

According to El-Bahrawi, cultural programmes now include useful information about history and the environment for people from all educational backgrounds. "Through television, cultural information is accessible to all people, especially those who are deprived of an education," she added. Channel 1 offers a variety of specialised pro-

grammes on theatre, cinema and Arabic music, she stated.

However, Mokhtar countered that the percentage of specialised cultural programmes is too low:

"There is very little on international theatre or jazz music, for example."

And, although documentary film-making in Egypt has a long and distinguished history, official television has thus far played a trivial role in the development of the industry, according to El-Hadidi. Unfortunately, Egyptian television does not encourage young filmmakers to produce new documentary films, she said.

"The documentary film is dead. Our production has no future simply because there is no audience," said Taghreed El-Afifi, a young filmmaker.

Documentary film-maker Fouad El-Tuhami said that most producers prefer to work with the more lucrative commercial advertisements. "Television advertisements have slowly devoured a big portion of the time that was once allocated for documentary films," he said. There once were special television programmes such as *Cinema in Cans* and *Cinema Does Not Lie but Beautifies* which featured new films, but due to a perceived lack of interest, these programmes have disappeared.

El-Bahrawi stated that the documentary film is an important element in cultural programming. But, she added, the problem with documentary films is that they are too long. A programme called "Films and Festivals" does screen such films and Channel 1 tries to produce documentary films, she noted.

Mohamed Samaa, an official in the cultural programming administration for radio, stressed that Egyptian radio and television have made enormous progress in educational and cultural programming. According to Samaa, a new educational satellite television channel will start broadcasting by the end of next year.

The main target of the new channel is to achieve progress in the process of human and cul-

tural development," Samaa explained. Programmes will include medical and scientific shows and the channel will be transmitted mainly to Arab and European countries. Currently, Samaa said, feasibility studies are being conducted in cooperation with education experts to plan programming.

El-Bahrawi emphasised that students in Arab countries who study the Egyptian curricula will benefit from Egyptian educational programmes. "The new channel," she said, "will also be a good chance to offer scientific programmes to students with more developed educational means."

El-Bahrawi noted that the regional channels (Channels 3-8) provide an excellent opportunity to

enlarge the volume of educational programmes. An ambitious plan to eliminate illiteracy through the six regional channels is currently under way. Education through remote learning is one programme produced by Channel 2.

El-Hadidi criticised the way announcers present their shows. "The traditional dialogue format is not appropriate in developing countries where the culture of pictures not words prevails," she said. She suggested that documentary footage or live interviews with people in their homes should be included in the shows.

Wagih agreed that the hosts of these shows need special training. "The hosts do not know anything

about modern interviewing techniques. Consequently, the shows are boring," he said.

And experts agreed that television plays a trivial role in developing people's awareness of the rapid technological progress in the world. "Educational programmes should be presented to the general public and not directed towards students during school hours," El-Hadidi said.

"The way audiences are thinking is rapidly changing," said Wagih. With a new information era fast approaching, Wagih believes, "we desperately need a new concept of cultural programmes that would help people to cope with the new challenges."



Ballet is traditional fare for culture on TV



News broadcasts are briefer and beeper

channels in search of culture, news and entertainment that lives up to the expectations generated by the satellite invasion



Television chief Soheir El-Hibri (top) hopes management's new hands-on attitude will translate into more successes like *Fawazir Ramadan* (left) and Samir Sabri's *This Evening* (right)

## A brand news day

The proliferation of satellite television news programming and the rising number of households tuning in has national channels scrambling to hold audience interest. Sahar El-Bahr zooms in

Five years ago, most people agreed that the least interesting show on homegrown television was the news. In what was a mighty ritual, viewers clicked from channel to channel searching for anything less fatuous. Those able to afford the satellite TV services, with their steady offerings of CNN, NBC International and EuroNews, quickly subscribed.

The policy makers at official television realised that something had to be done to shore up the flow of viewers flooding into the satellite markets.

Mohamed El-Wakil, general manager of the television news sector, said officials are prioritising keeping a competitive edge. "It is a matter of life or death. If the people do not like the news they can simply switch the channel."

In a bid to attract more viewers, changes have been adopted in both the form and content of news broadcasts.

Among the new changes are limiting the broadcast of breaking news to important events, scheduling brief news summaries throughout the day, and employing Electronic

News Gathering (ENG). Through ENG, footage is available live on the spot while news is breaking. News on important events are beefed up with analytical voice reports from correspondents on the scene. And officials are now adding a summary of the top stories with highlight footage from the day's news before morning and evening broadcasts.

Most of the time, professor of mass communications at Cairo University, noted that there have been changes in arranging the priorities of the news. News no longer depends on its official significance, she said, but on how popular the story is with the general public. A big match between Ahli and Zamalek may qualify as a top story based on its popularity.

"News is becoming more and more dependent on features. News magazines now highlight sports and social issues for light and entertaining news," El-Wakil said.

Now there is a logical informational flow, according to Husein Amin, professor of mass communication at the American University in Cairo. "The transition of the news and the link

between the local and international news is more coherent and logical," he said.

With the unpredictable nature of news events surrounding the peace process and Arab-Israeli relations, Ali Fahim, general manager of television news, stressed the importance of Egyptian television being a leader in covering regional news. And, according to Fahim, official television must reckon with its role as an international news organisation.

In October the news room will inaugurate a state-of-the-art News-Star System. The system employs a computer archive of news agency wire reports and video footage which will be kept on file for up to one year. A new training centre has opened to acquaint staff with the latest technology.

El-Hibri explained that each channel has its own policy in screening the news. Content is often linked to state policies. News concerning the ruling National Democratic Party for example is usually at the beginning of the programme. The presentation of international news stories generally reflects Egypt's relationship with other countries, she added.

Egypt is in good terms with a country, a lot of broadcast time will be allotted for that country.

Amin noted it is easier to make changes to the format rather than the content. Censorship for political reasons is to be expected, he said. "We are not living in a dream land with total freedom, but we are developing gradually with the passage of time."

Five years ago the visual dimension was completely absent from news. In those days, television news felt more like radio: for most of the broadcast, an announcer would read the news without any video clips.

"Eye contact is important because it conveys a sense of credibility," pointed out Amin. "In the past announcers nervously shuffled through papers on-air and would sometimes mix up the order of stories. Now, of course, they read from a tele-prompter."

Officials are confident that the changes are reflecting viewer's interests. People interested in health and scientific news regularly call to ask for more details. "This proves that the audience are tuning in until the end," he said.

## Nasser '56 and beyond

Film director Youssef Francis' latest work, *The Search for Tutankhamun*, about the excavation of King Tut's tomb at the turn of the century, is a massive production. Francis needed period clothes and props, hundreds of extras to represent the labourers who excavated the tomb and a superior cast. "I seriously doubt an independent producer could afford all that," he explained.

Francis' film and many more like it are being funded by the production sector of state television. The TV

Production Sector is also involved in planning entertainment such as art exhibitions or musical performances for national celebrations. And it prepared and designed the main conference room at the Shams El-Sheikh Peacemakers Summit as well as the Arab summit in Cairo last July.

"We look for work which deals with national issues and tackles social problems in an exciting way," explained Mamdouh El-Leithi, director of the Production Sector. "Nasser '56 was the start and some 24 more

works are expected to follow," he added.

State television can produce films which independent producers cannot manage because of prohibitive production costs, Francis pointed out.

Therefore, according to El-Leithi, state TV is helping to solve the cinema crisis because it selects serious subjects which are suitable for both cinema and television. "The cinema crisis began with the Gulf crisis when producers stopped financing films and when revenues were down.

At that time we thought it necessary for us, as the Production Sector of official TV, to help with production and distribution," he explained.

The Production Sector usually provides the executive producer of a film with around LE300,000 — an amount which can be increased if needed. The sector also chooses the director and the actors and approves of the scenario.

But television should not be a substitute for the independent cinema producer, stressed Mariane Khouri, herself an independent producer at the Misr International Films

production company. "It should support the cinema industry by buying our films at fair prices or co-producing large-scale productions," she said.

And competition should not figure into the relationship, she warned. "Competition would be unfair to the independent producers. A film like *Nasser '56* succeeded because a lot of money was spent on advertising and marketing. But an independent producer has a limited budget."

Francis stressed that although the marriage of television and cinema initially seems successful, officials must proceed with caution. "We should seriously evaluate the results before we produce more," he emphasised.

The Production Sector complained that the budget allocated for TV films is not enough. Officials are more willing to provide hefty budgets for popular serials which seem more worth the money because they use more airtime, he explained. "The Ramadan series *I Will Not Live in My Father's Galabya* cost about LE2 million. It was approved because it used 30 hours of airtime whereas a film for TV wouldn't use more than two hours of airtime," he said.

Hosni also complained that Egyptian producers who work with state television are not allowed to distribute their own work. "In any country in the world, the TV producer has the right to sell his film to whoever he wants. But here the work becomes the property of official television," he said.

Several producers stressed the importance of Egyptian productions maintaining a competitive edge in the region. Leithi was confident that the new relationship between cinema and television will increasingly draw more viewers.

"During the bony month of Ramadan, which is considered the peak season for television viewing in the Middle East, audiences in the region still tune in to Egyptian television more than competitors in the Arab world," El-Leithi said. In fact, he added, Arab TV stations buy a large portion of Egyptian production for their Ramadan audiences.

"In 1980, official television literally stopped production. At that time production was limited to private producers and the Cairo Audio Visual Company. Starting in 1989, television production came back to life and we recorded around 140 hours. So far in 1996, we have recorded more than 1,000 hours and we plan to exceed 5,000 hours after the inauguration of the new media city in 6 October City," said El-Leithi.

According to a report issued by the economic department of state television, Egyptian TV and the radio drew in LE67 million in revenues during last Ramadan. "About 17 Arab TV and radio stations bought 7,740 hours of programming produced by the Production Sector. The revenues from the hours sold to 17 Arab countries were LE32 million while the revenues from the advertisements shown on the official television and Nile TV were LE35 million," the report said.

## Children's hour

Children like to watch TV. But, Dina Ezzat asks, does the "small screen" satisfy their interests?

For many children a house without television is boring. Experts agree that television is the major source of entertainment and information for most rural and urban children. "The average Egyptian child, from four-year-olds to 18-year-olds, spends long hours watching TV every day and especially during holidays," notes Fayza Youssef, professor of child psychology and dean of the Ain Shams Higher Institute for Children's Studies.

This means that children acquire much of their attitude patterns and values from what they see on the screen.

Every day, the nation's two major TV channels broadcast an average of five to six children's programmes. In addition, cartoon and mini-shows are broadcast during late afternoon and early evening hours.

Karim is a seven-year-old pupil at one of Cairo's English-language schools. Asked about his favourite summer holiday hobby, he immediately answered, "watching TV". Karim, his parents say, enjoys his swimming classes, children's magazines, and colouring books, but it is watching TV that he likes best.

According to Youssef, an average daily dose of television for a child could add up to anything between four and nine hours, depending on the season, the child's age, concentration ability and parental attitudes.

TV officials say that these programmes are produced with the interest and taste of children from the age of three to 18 in mind. "The early morning programmes are for pre-schoolers, the late afternoon is for primary school children, and the early evening is for older kids," explains Afaf El-Hellawi, director of Channel 2 children's programming and a veteran host of children's TV programmes.

Television programming for children is supposed to provide entertainment as well as general knowledge. "For the little ones we try and provide basic and simple information about things they can relate to like planting flowers. For the older kids we talk about computers as well as recent and new inventions," El-Hellawi adds.

But experts argue that the quality of children's productions should be higher. Youssef pleads, "TV officials should come up with programmes that are more intelligent and interesting for children of all ages."

The hosts of children's programmes are believed to be the major source of insult to children's intelligence. They often appear on-air unprepared and speak in incomplete sentences and jarringly intonations.

"Unfortunately this is very true," criticises Fadila Tawfiq, a veteran radio producer of children's programmes and a lecturer at a number of faculties and institutes specialised in children's studies.

"The basic problem of these hosts is that they have not studied anything about children. They know nothing about what children are interested in or what grabs their attention," she says with a ring of sorrow. "As a result they fail miserably to grip their audience's attention."

Indeed, throughout the 1960s and 1970s, hosts like Salwa Haggazi, Nagwa Ibrahim, and Magid Abd-el-Raziq were very popular among younger generations. Today, says Tawfiq, none of the over 20 hosts "make even the smallest impact on their viewers".

Many agree that most hosts think they are doing fine if they wear their hair in a pony tail and repeat "my young friends" over and over again.

TV insiders say that there is hardly any new talent interested in hosting children's programmes. According to one source, "It is those who fail to impress that are shunted to the children's department".

Script writers, editors and directors are also part of the problem. "Dealing with children requires a special talent that not everybody is cut out for," says Tawfiq.

Special courses are arranged for new members of the children's department, says El-Hellawi, to make sure that they have enough knowledge about dealing with children.

However, parents charge that the on-air hosts of most of these programmes lack the basic understanding of the complex dimensions of a child's personality at this time and age. This is reflected in their performance. "They talk about silly subjects in a silly manner," criticises Dalia, a mother of two kids. "At the age of eight, my son refuses to watch children's programmes and instead goes on watching regular shows instead."

One researcher who surveyed 200 children of different ages and social backgrounds about their favourite TV programmes, found that it is adult and not children's programming that they like to watch.

The quality of the material broadcast is not really up to the expected standard, says child psychologist Youssef.

According to Youssef, it is important that "older children from 12 to 18-year-olds find programming that suits their interests. While it is true that an 18-year-old may enjoy watching a Walt Disney cartoon, he or she still wants to see something different."

For this age group, Youssef recommends light drama that involves basic sex education "in a scientific fashion that suits our culture and religious values. Of course at the age of 18, a child would start wondering about the world of sex and nobody could expect him to watch *Korona* [a popular children's show featuring a puppet]."

Specialists agree that long hours of straight TV watching can only be "destructive" for children. "It hampers the development of a child's speaking and motor skills. It also hinders social communication between the child and the world," points out Youssef. And it becomes especially unhealthy if programming is sub-standard or over-dosed with anti-social values like violence.

"There is so much violence on TV these days," complains one grandmother. "Even the cartoons are full of violence. My grandson becomes so agitated after watching afternoon cartoons. He fights with other children more and more every day. When I was bringing up my children, cartoons were about nice values but now they teach a boy that beating other children makes him a superman."

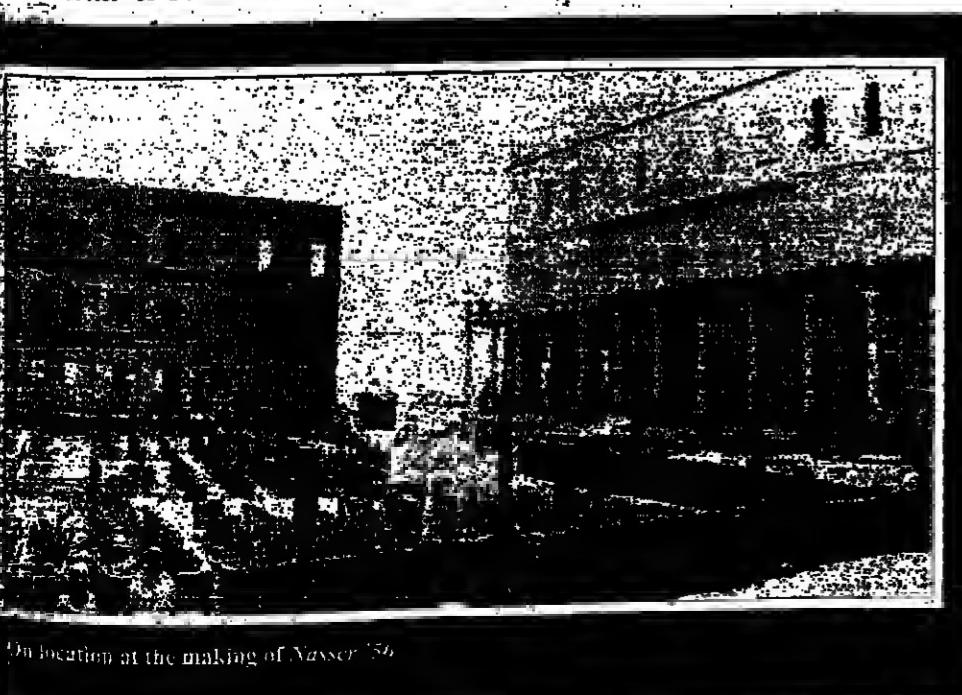
"We have noted this problem and we are trying very hard to eliminate all elements of violence from the material we broadcast, especially for the younger age groups who may be easily influenced by what they watch," El-Hellawi responds.

Generally, experts recommend that it is useful for a four to seven-year-old to have a parent sitting through the largest part of TV watching for guidance. "This is the age of questioning: a child wants to know the why, where and what. If a parent is there for him then it is very useful," Youssef explains.

But parents say they find it difficult to explain violent content to their children. They say it makes control over what their children watch much more difficult because the adult programming, especially for those families subscribing to the increasingly popular satellite TV channels, involves much more than two cartoon supermen battling with each other. "You have drug addicts portrayed as Robin Hoods, women portrayed as floozies and violent men glorified," criticises Youssef.

Some parents suggested that all TV channels should introduce a ratings system that helps parent control what their kids watch. But some psychiatrists argue that this is not a good idea especially with kids in their early teens. "If you tell your child that he cannot watch this programme because he is still too young he will go to a friend's house and watch it there," Youssef says. "And if you control Egyptian TV how would you control the transmission coming from all over the world?"

El-Hellawi says, "We are keen on developing this system. We are going to introduce better programmes. But it takes time."



On location at the making of *Nasser '56*



Good value along with a genuine Egyptian atmosphere and a friendly attitude are all that tourists look for when they decide to stay in a budget hotel

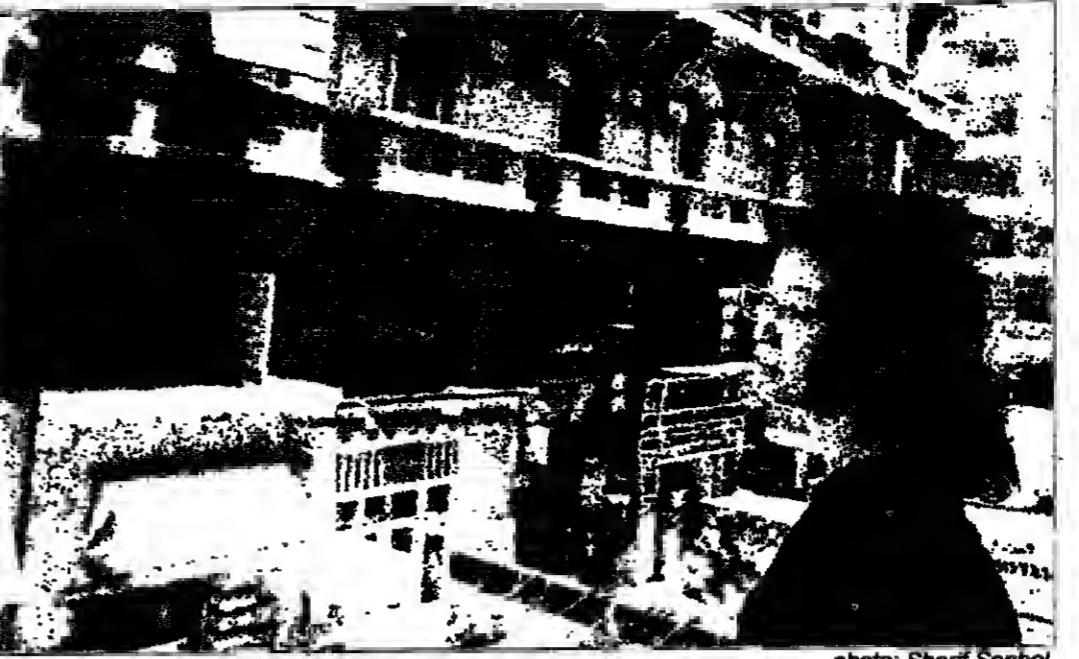


photo: Sherif Sonbol

## Touring the region

Elhamy El-Zayat, director of MEMETA's executive council and head of Emco Travel, talked to **Omeyma Abdel-Latif** about regional tourism cooperation. The following are extracts from the interview

"Within the coming few weeks, MEMETA (Middle East - Mediterranean Travel and Tourist Association) will be officially registered as the first regional tourist organisation, bringing together more than 20 countries."

"MEMETA is a mix of government and private sector officials who enjoy top managerial positions in the field of tourism. Ministries of tourism of the member states have one representative on the board of governors which will also include two representatives from the private sector of each country. The voting power is equal among all members. It will function as a private sector business."

"Among the regional members, there are four founding parties; Egypt, Israel, the Palestinian National Authority and Jordan. Other countries that have joined already are Tunisia, Morocco, Cyprus, and Turkey. Oman, Qatar and Malta are expected to sign in the near future."

"We are pinning hopes on the ongoing peace process so that Syria and Lebanon would join hopefully after signing a peace agreement with Israel."

"There are also extra-regional members. We are aiming to become a unique organisation with members from the region and members from the countries that send their tourists in the region. These include Europe, the Americas, the Pacific Rim including South East Asia, Korea, Indonesia, and Thailand."

"All members have agreed that the role of governments is to try and iron out governmental formalities to facilitate the flow of people among the countries of the region. If MEMETA requests, for example, that airports should be more accessible to national carriers in the region, government representatives should work towards this end. Governments also have a special role because they contribute financially; they review MEMETA's budget but do not interfere with our plan of action."

"Within the executive council each country has a chapter which includes all bodies related to the tourism industry. The Egyptian chapter was established with an anticipated membership of 100 travel companies and agencies by the end of 1996. We will appoint a facilitator to promote the organisation and recruit members from Europe."

"A future MEMETA project is to create a database of tourist sites, antiquities and visa requirements so that if people want to visit more than one country, it would be easier."

"MEMETA will also provide training facilities not only for the region but for employees from the Americas, Europe, and Asia. Thereby, when they are selling Egypt or Syria to the customer, they can do a better job in convincing clients."

"This sort of international co-operation is beneficial to everybody. One very important point concerning regional co-operation is that for peace to last long-lasting, people have to know each other and this is why we should encourage inter-regional co-operation."

# Who needs stars?

"Zero-star" hotels are cosy accommodations for tourists on a shoestring budget, writes **Sherine Nasr**

Most people are familiar with the big names in the hotel business — Hilton, Sheraton, Intercontinental and Marriott to name just a few. But five-star accommodations are notoriously expensive. For tourists and students with limited budgets, a group of "zero-star" hotels are just as satisfactory, as the big names.

But the only thing these hotels have in common with 5-star hotels is perhaps a bed to sleep on. Instead of air conditioning, marble floors and natural greenery, zero-star hotels offer ceiling fans, ceramic tiles, and plastic flowers. There are many travellers, however, who have no problem with forgoing five-star

luxuries, and are willing to settle for more modest accommodations, so long as these are clean and, above all, safe, according to guests.

The Ministry of Tourism lists these hotels, in a group below the one-star hotels, as unrated. In Cairo, most are located in the vicinity of Talaat Harb and 26th July Streets. The least expensive and perhaps the most famous among foreigners lie on Al-Tawfiq Street, where an old Greek-style building houses three hotels. Judging by the dimness of the building entrance, newcomers may have second thoughts. But things brighten up considerably once visitors reach the reception areas.

Brightly-painted murals of Pharaonic faces colour the walls in the modestly furnished reception area of one of these hotels. A small desk, two comfortable sofas, a television set and a coffee table loaded with books and magazines create a cosy but simple atmosphere.

"This is where our guests meet and spend time exchanging travel stories," explains Amr Abdallah, general manager of the hotel. The majority of his guests are Japanese tourists.

Beyond the reception is a long corridor which leads to five huge dormitories, bathrooms and a kitchen which is always open for late night snacking.

Some of these hotels do not even have a kitchen. "It is a luxury we thought we could do without," explains Tarek El-Abbasi, general manager of Venice Hotel. "Most of our clients are not interested in elaborate meals. They find it cheaper to buy ready-made foods like *fried* and *ta mawa*."

Many travellers say that five-star hotels provide a lot of services that are unnecessary. Yumiko Kawaduchi, a young Japanese school secretary, explains, "A beautifully decorated room and Nile view are very nice, but friendly receptionists and homey feeling are more attractive to me."

Kawaduchi also likes the fact that she can leave her things in her room and find them untouched when she comes back.

And, Abdallah adds, low-budget hotels offer unusual services such as looking after travellers' belongings. "A guest can leave his luggage with us for weeks if away on a journey. And, since we don't take commission from tourist markets, we provide our clients with honest information about the cheapest places to buy souvenirs or rent a horse or a boat on the Nile."

Cole Davis, a wine consultant from the United States, has used a low-budget hotel on all three of his visits to Cairo. He stayed in similar hotels in Luxor, Aswan and Siwa. According to Cole, one night in a Luxor hotel with a swimming pool cost him LE15 and he paid LE17 for one night in a hotel in Alexandria.

"I try to grasp the essence of a country. You can't do that in a five-star hotel where the atmosphere is more Western," Davis says.

The location is usually a big plus with these hotels, Davis. "The hotel is close to the Egyptian Museum and Coptic and Islamic monuments in Old Cairo are accessible by bus. The Tawfiq market nearby gives me a lot of original colour."

Abdallah explained that some tourists prefer these places not only because they are cheaper but because they are far more relaxed than regular hotels. "Guests can cook at anytime or play the guitar till dawn. Groups travelling together can stay in the same room. The atmosphere makes life easier and more enjoyable," he says.

Zero-star hotels are particularly popular with backpackers, the type of travellers who travel the world on limited budgets, and students who are staying in Egypt for a long time and do not want to spend much on accommodations. "Many of our clients work as engineers, nurses, air hosts and hostesses, computer programmers, plumbers and secretaries," says Abdallah, adding that the majority of his clients are from Australia, New Zealand, the US, Japan and Scandinavia.

The only staff these hotels have usually consists of a receptionist and a cleaning person. "The receptionist plays the role of the general manager, financial manager and maintenance supervisor," explains Abdallah. It is the receptionist's job to make sure that the bed sheets are changed daily, the rooms are kept in good shape and to see that no water is leaking from taps.

As these hotels are, more or less, similar to one another as regards the type of services they offer, the main competition among them, it seems, is to provide the best treatment and cleanliness possible.

"These are the two main areas for a hotel to excel over another," El-Abbasi says. "Our clients already know that they will be provided with almost no services. The only thing they care for is cleanliness," he added.

Luxor and Aswan offer the highest number of these hotels — in Aswan alone there are 14. The cheapest runs at LE7 a night while a more expensive one charges LE15. Fifteen such hotels can be found in Alexandria where a room overlooking the sea will cost LE16. There are plenty in Port Said, Dabab and the oases. The full details about these accommodations are available in two international travel guide books, *Let's Go* and *Lonely Planet*.

Newly-opened hotels print their own promotional leaflets and distribute them among tourists at the airport, railway station and other tourist destinations.

"This is how we managed to get our first clients. The cleanliness and the helpful attitude did the rest," says El-Abbasi.

### Travellers' book guide:

## Islamic architecture for beginners

It is a pleasure to see Doris Behrens-Abusel's *Islamic Architecture in Cairo: An Introduction* back on the market again after a fresh printing. The outcome of courses that the author taught with great success for several years at the American University in Cairo, it is an attractive, convenient and useful survey of the architectural history of our great capital.

General chapters discuss the stages of the city's growth from its foundation onward, the stylistic evolution of Islamic architecture in Cairo, and the peculiarities of Cairene domestic architecture. The bulk of the book consists of detailed descriptions of a handful of major or representative buildings, a mere 67 in all, constructed in the city during its first 12 centuries, beginning with the original Mosque of Amr Ibn Al-'As at Fustat and concluding with the Mohamed Ali Mosque at the Citadel. Each description includes a brief bibliography. There are 132 half-tone plates and 35 line drawings and plans.

Subtitled "An Introduction," the book is intended for beginners and can be effectively used by people who are interested in the subject, but are otherwise completely uninstructed. It concentrates upon architecture rather than history, and as Behrens-Abusel herself emphasises, it hardly touches upon the urban ecology of the historic zone, the traditional environment and ways of life that give the city's heart its primary value. Medieval monuments contribute to this value, but by no means constitute the whole of it.

Despite its elementary aims, any expert would willingly testify that this book represents considerably more than a once-over-lightly treatment. For one thing, it neatly summarises a massive amount of information, as the bibliographies indicate, in Arabic, English, French, German and Turkish.

Behrens-Abusel herself has carried out important research, moreover, on Cairo's morphology as well as on individual buildings, knows the historic zone and its architecture of all periods and at all levels intimately, and is therefore frequently able in these pages both to offer informed insights of her own and to correct the studies of earlier scholars.

*Islamic Architecture in Cairo* is no substitute for visiting the real buildings it describes, much less for simply spending three or four hours in Cairo's real historic zone itself. There these 67 structures stand, among hundreds of others, along streets that still have their medieval conformation and still offer the most successful urban life-style that mankind has yet devised.

The city's historic zone is, in fact, one large single monument, and it is currently being dismantled at a rate so rapid that nothing authentic or worth attempting to experience will be left of it in a few years' time. As instruction, this book will serve most readers more than sufficiently. If it encourages them to visit the historic zone in person while they still can, however, it will serve them notably indeed.

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## Women's winning ways

The Egyptian women's football team tapped and trapped their way to victory over the junior men's team in an encounter in Alexandria last Friday. Eric Asomugha looks to their future

The national women's football team in Egypt has yet to reach the same standard of training and encouragement as that enjoyed by their counterparts in other countries. But if the results of last week's match against the Smouha Youth Centre junior men's team is anything to go by it won't be long before fans stand up and take notice.

Under the supervision of coach Ashraf Sheik and his assistant Waled Hassan, the women took the game 3-1 on penalties after a goalless draw.

Cheered by a group of scanty spectators, at the Arab Academy for Science and Technology in Alexandria the women proved that the sky is the limit for their success. With aggressive ball possession and utilising teamwork to attack from both flanks the women landed six shots on target to the men's four.

Striker Wessam Othman's play was brilliant with Sera Hassanien and Amal Abdel-Karim assisting. Wessam, losing few chances, came close to scoring in the 10th minute of the first half but her powerful header was saved by the men's goalkeeper. Othman and company kept up the pressure, but the men's central defender Mohamed Ibrahim stood firm in his position.

In the second half the men rebounded as striker Mohamed Hesni led a sudden attack that put goalkeeper Sherin Shahabi to the first real test of the game. The match intensified with some hard tackling as both teams fought for a winning goal before the women clinched the lead.

But, as easy as the victory appeared to observers, team trainer Hossam Farris, believes long-term planning and a carefully monitored training scheme are prerequisites if success is the goal.

Prior to 1993, women's football was played mostly for fun part of night activities during the month of Ramadan. During the holy month many sporting clubs featured five-a-side women's teams in their competitions.

After three years of efforts, 1996 witnessed the birth of the Egyptian Women's Soccer Committee (EWSC), affiliated to the Supreme Council for Youth and Sports (SCYS).

An initiative fed by EWSC President Sahar El-Hawary, is currently underway to form an independent women's soccer federation which will be solely responsible for all its activities.

"I started it three years ago with no support whatsoever from anyone except my father, an ex-FIFA referee, and my family," Hawary told *Al-Ahram Weekly*.

Faced with opposition from SCYS officials Hawary never gave up her quest to attain her goal of establishing a national women's team.

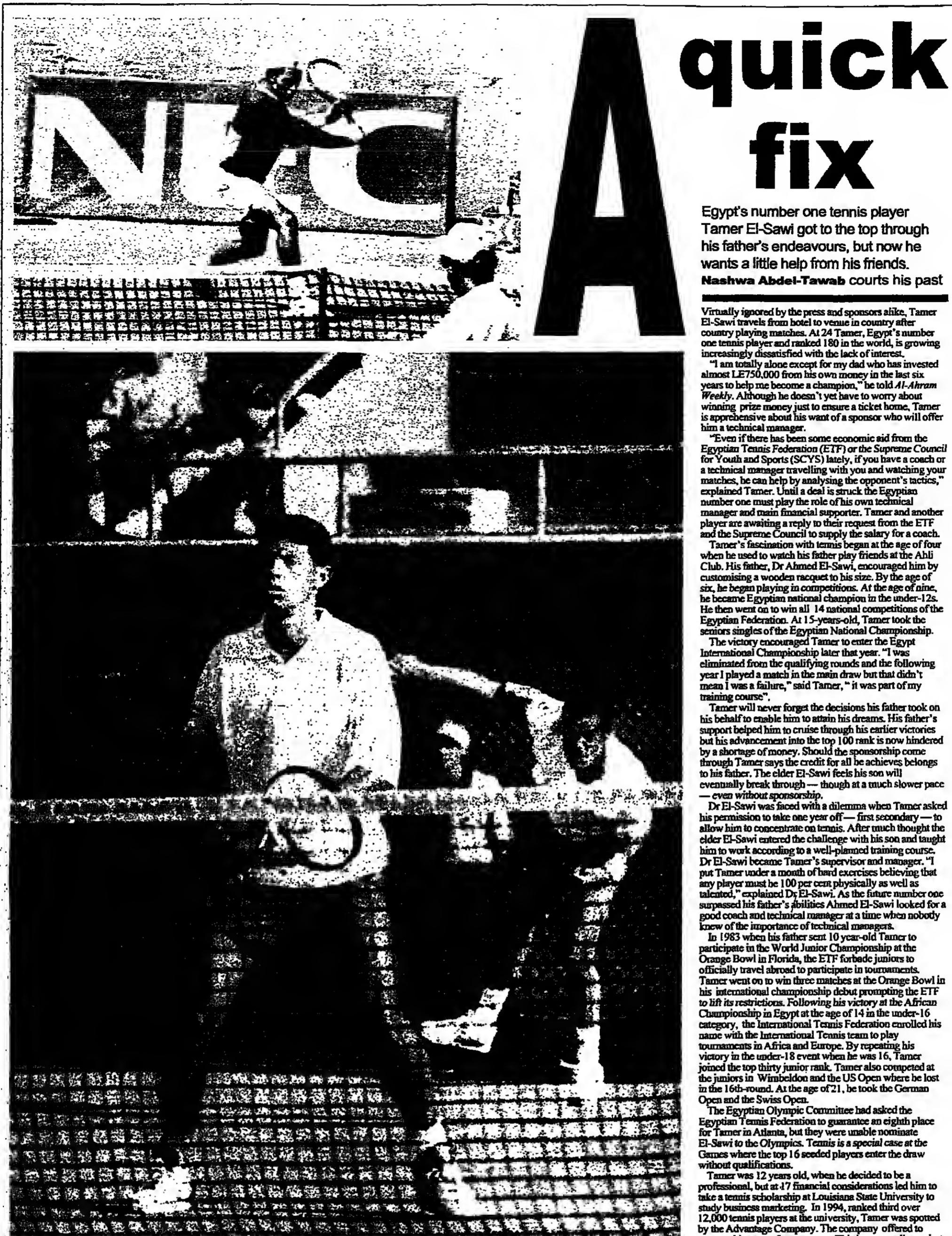
"I took it upon myself because I believe in it and it was my dream to have a women's football team in Egypt," she explained.

Hawary was inspired by the participation of other countries in the first Women's World Cup in China in 1991.

Hawary's endeavours have won her the respect and support of sports officials from the men's national league. "This is because they are sportsmen who really understand and are proud of what I am doing," said Sahar.

The women's team activities have gathered momentum since the creation of EWSC earlier this year. Few players were raised initially but today, in addition to the national team, there are women's clubs in Cairo, Giza, Aloubeyha, Alexandria, El-Qanah region, Zagazig and Garbyia. "We approached the athletes parents and they readily cooperated and encouraged their daughters to join the new teams," said Serafina Sayed, an official at the EWSC. Under the EWSC, women footballers in other governorates are in the process of forming clubs to compete with those already established. The EWSC is also targeting schools to groom players and encourage more competitors. Two international friendlies against Swedish clubs have been staged and local matches are now played on a regular basis.

Next on line is the African qualifications for the 1999 Women's World Cup in the USA. Preparations for this event are quite a task, but Sahar El-Hawary is more than ready. "We are making plans to be there, but first we must have an independent federation which I'm working on," she said. Financial support will be needed from the private sector for further progress with federation plans. The EWSC is scheduling friendly matches in preparation for the qualifications. Hawary said talks are in the early stages with clubs from Italy, Morocco and South Africa.



Tamer El-Sawi serves up a taste of what made him Egypt's number one

photos: Abdel Wahab El-Senafi and M. Mohamed Lutfi

## Where are they now?

AFTER the defection of two Egyptian players at the 1996 Atlanta Olympics, Egypt has clamped strict security measures around its athletes at the Paralympics in Atlanta.

News was scantly concerning the whereabouts of two Egyptian athletes who disappeared during the Atlanta Games. Wrestler Mustafa Abdel-Harith and

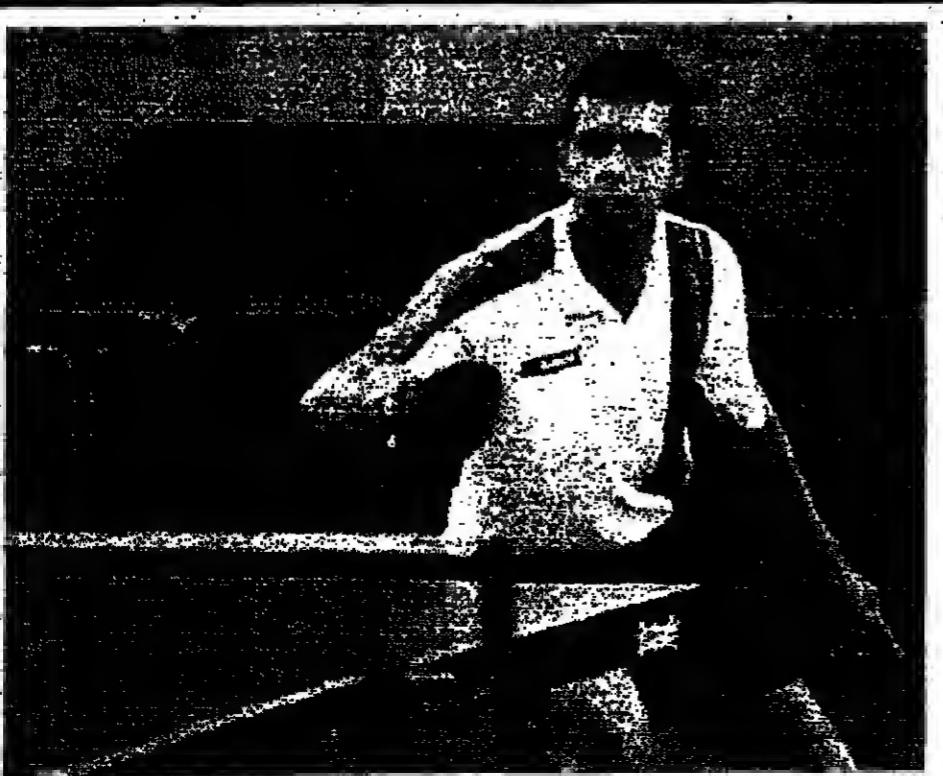
handball player Ahmed El-Awadi opted to remain in the United States when their delegation returned earlier in the month. Rumours circulating at the Paralympics had the two players working in the US. Abdel-Harith allegedly has joined a club in New York while the less lucky El-Awadi has been employed as a waiter in an Italian restaurant in North Carolina.

## Table tennis tourney

EGYPT is hosting the 15th Arab Table Tennis Championship from 18-27 August at the indoor halls of Cairo Stadium. 15 countries from all over the Arab world are competing in the team and single events. In a championship first, juniors under 14 and juniors under 17 are competing in addition to the usual senior category.

While the Egyptian men's is taping up its full complement, the women's team is vying without star player Nihal Mestref. The champion, has excused herself from competition due to impending motherhood.

The Egyptian delegation, which took first place at the 1995 Doha Championship, hopes to retain the title for the fourth consecutive time.



Egypt's Ashraf Helmi in the opening match

Edited by Inas Mazhar

# quick fix

Egypt's number one tennis player Tamer El-Sawi got to the top through his father's endeavours, but now he wants a little help from his friends. **Nashwa Abdel-Tawab courts his past**

Virtually ignored by the press and sponsors alike, Tamer El-Sawi travels from hotel to venue in country after country playing matches. At 24 Tamer, Egypt's number one tennis player and ranked 180 in the world, is growing increasingly dissatisfied with the lack of interest.

"I am totally alone except for my dad who has invested almost LE750,000 from his own money in the last six years to help me become a champion," he told *Al-Ahram Weekly*. Although he doesn't yet have to worry about winning prize money just to ensure a ticket home, Tamer is apprehensive about his want of a sponsor who will offer him a technical manager.

"Even if there has been some economic aid from the Egyptian Tennis Federation (ETF) or the Supreme Council for Youth and Sports (SCYS) lately, if you have a coach or a technical manager travelling with you and watching your matches, he can help by analysing the opponent's tactics," explained Tamer. Until a deal is struck the Egyptian number one must play the role of his own technical manager and main financial supporter. Tamer and another player are awaiting a reply to their request from the ETF and the Supreme Council to supply the salary for a coach.

Tamer's fascination with tennis began at the age of four when he used to watch his father play friends at the Ahli Club. His father, Dr Ahmed El-Sawi, encouraged him by customising a wooden racquet to his size. By the age of six, he began playing in competitions. At the age of nine, he became Egyptian national champion in the under-12s. He then went on to win all 14 national competitions of the Egyptian Federation. At 15-years-old, Tamer took the seniors singles of the Egyptian National Championship.

The victory encouraged Tamer to enter the Egypt International Championship later that year. "I was eliminated from the qualifying rounds and the following year I played a match in the main draw but that didn't mean I was a failure," said Tamer, "it was part of my training course".

Tamer will never forget the decisions his father took on his behalf to enable him to attain his dreams. His father's support helped him to cruise through his earlier victories but as his advancement into the top 100 rank is now hindered by a shortage of money. Should the sponsorship come through Tamer says the credit for all he achieves belongs to his father. The elder El-Sawi feels his son will eventually break through — though at a much slower pace — even without sponsorship.

Dr El-Sawi was faced with a dilemma when Tamer asked his permission to take one year off — first secondary — to allow him to concentrate on tennis. After much thought the elder El-Sawi entered the challenge with his son and taught him to work according to a well-planned training course. Dr El-Sawi became Tamer's supervisor and manager. "I put Tamer under a month of hard exercises believing that any player must be 100 per cent physically as well as talented," explained Dr El-Sawi. As the future number one surpassed his father's accolades Ahmed El-Sawi looked for a good coach and technical manager at a time when nobody knew the importance of technical managers.

In 1983 when his father sent 10-year-old Tamer to participate in the World Junior Championship at the Orange Bowl in Florida, the ETF forbade juniors to officially travel abroad to participate in tournaments. Tamer went on to win three matches at the Orange Bowl in his international championship debut prompting the ETF to lift its restrictions. Following his victory at the African Championship in Egypt at the age of 14 in the under-16 category, the International Tennis Federation enrolled his name with the International Tennis team to play tournaments in Africa and Europe. By repeating his victory in the under-18 event when he was 16, Tamer joined the top thirty junior rank. Tamer also competed at the juniors at Wimbledon and the US Open where he lost in the 16th-round. At the age of 21, he took the German Open and the Swiss Open.

The Egyptian Olympic Committee had asked the Egyptian Tennis Federation to guarantee an eighth place for Tamer in Atlanta, but they were unable nominate El-Sawi to the Olympics. Tennis is a special case at the Games where the top 16 seeded players enter the draw without qualifications.

Tamer was 12 years old, when he decided to be a professional, but at 17 financial considerations led him to take a tennis scholarship at Louisiana State University to study business marketing. In 1994, ranked third over 12,000 tennis players at the university, Tamer was spotted by the Advantage Company. The company offered to manage his career for two years. This is one small step, but who will give him a quick hand up?



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Président et Rédacteur en Chef  
Ibrahim Nafie

**Osman El-Mahdi:**

# Calling the tune

Not four, but a thousand voices. It moves everywhere, and this love for it is what gives him, a player, a reposeful and restraining stature. The myth comes off on him — like blue bright snow

Osman El-Mahdi uses the violin as an instrument, not as a weapon of aggression. Leave your safety helmet at home when you come to listen to his playing; he's no zealot with a loose G-string. In fact, he's a thoughtful and quiet player — no trace to the midnight peace.

El-Mahdi says violinists know its acute sensitivity and treat it with respect. He says the violin will not be bullied — never, or told what to do. It can turn capricious and even toneless. El-Mahdi says it does not have a naturally beautiful tone. It is bare and scrawny. All its alluring sounds rest with the collusion between player and instrument.

How does anyone manage to play such a thing? By the apparently magic means of teaching. El-Mahdi was fortunate enough to have three remarkable gurus to pass on the secrets of finger, wrist, arm and body which produce the tone and voice of the instrument. The city of Cairo has some small chamber string orchestras, one symphony orchestra and the newly formed Cairo Opera Orchestra. The two latter have the important job of providing the Cairo scene with opera, ballet and the usual weekly symphony concerts. Alone, these two orchestras require a large number of players, mostly strings.

The Cairo musical scene is therefore not as restricted as it is often reputed to be. With the auto-cannibalistic rites Europe is inflicting upon itself, the resulting chaos has sent out into the world many musicians who float from place to place, or, as El-Mahdi says, contract to contract. Cairo gets its share, and the orchestras are therefore manned with floaters and drifters working here briefly — next stop, anywhere. This does not build good orchestras, which need the home-based mentality to produce good results.

One man, Osman El-Mahdi, used to be a floater until he drifted back into Cairo in 1994, when the Cairo Opera Orchestra was formed to share the burden with the Cairo Symphony Orchestra. He was made the concertmaster of the former. The orchestra is good and plays almost continuously. El-Mahdi's duties are planning programmes, aiding and assisting the rest of the orchestra in any problems that arise. He is the contact line to the higher

authority when any disputes of policy arise. And, of course, he is first violin. He has obvious authority of manner but never fusses. One visiting maestro working with him called him the Sphinx: he keeps his peace and his opinions to himself; his temper always under control. So the orchestra gets on with itself peacefully and is proving a major gift to the music scene.

The violin is the instrument most surrounded by myth. Mad legends have proliferated around it since the dawn of time. The gods conceived it. Apollo preferred it to all other instruments. Marsyas was flayed alive because of his genius at it. And so on, down through history. Its pre-eminence was established by the strings and the orchestra march together to victory. We are conscious of the pianist at work, but the violinist and the violin are one and the same thing. They melt into each other and eventually into the small, acutely conscious body of the instrument. In earlier times, it was always called a soul. The small imperious thing curled up on the shoulder of its player, tucked comfortably in between neck and shoulder, is like a wicked, knowing cat.

Like El-Mahdi, violinists move in an aura of elation. There are such a lot of secrets about the mastery of it that, to the layman, all the fuss must appear crack-brained. Like El-Mahdi, it is one of the tenets of the distribution of instruments in an orchestra that violinists are number one. Everything can go wrong at a concert hall. But if a violin makes one false note or is wrongly pitched, the result is consternation.

Listening to the strings is always exciting, particularly if they swoon and croon with that particular perfection they alone have. They make people cry. They have the tear in the voice, as opera specialists say of voices — Di Stefano (tenor), Ginette Neveu (violinist). And Nero fiddled while Rome burned. String instruments strangle with emotion. *Tristan*, Debussy's *Peleus* and the Brahmin poem of the loneliness and passing of youth. The strings excel at tears and even-tears, but can dance better than anything else. The Vietnamese waltz does not exist without the fiddle.

The strings are like air and water to music. They flow everywhere, in and out of everything. Except jazz. They lack percussive power. Their rhythmic accent is softer, weaker than the piano. Pianos come and go, but the fiddle goes on forever, alone

or in dozens, in large orchestras. Music could get on without the piano but the entire Western musical structure is unthinkable without the strings. Violin first, and second viola, cello, double bass. They are the body and the living life which supports the rest of the orchestra.

Small wonder that the players are so powerful and important. If the strings get angry in the Berlin Philharmonic, then the whole of Berlin trembles. Politics and national interests can temporarily be dismissed: the strings and the orchestra march together to victory. We are conscious of the pianist at work, but the violinist and the violin are one and the same thing. They melt into each other and eventually into the small, acutely conscious body of the instrument. In earlier times, it was always called a soul. The small imperious thing curled up on the shoulder of its player, tucked comfortably in between neck and shoulder, is like a wicked, knowing cat.

The floating process which makes up a major part of a professional musician's life in the 1990s began for El-Mahdi in Alexandria, where he was born in 1958. In 1988, the new Opera House was opened in Cairo. Between these two dates began the wandering part of his life. At five years of age, he and an elder sister began to study music, she the piano and he the violin. There was no opposition from the family. The father was a doctor who liked music, and the mother did the caring. El-Mahdi soon passed the necessary exams as a violinist at the Conservatoire. And when the boy was 11 his much-loved father died suddenly. There was the usual feeling of desolation at such an event. But he remembers: he said to himself that his father would have agreed with his decision to stick to music, no matter what obstacles. He was at St Marc's School. The family then decided to go to Cairo to live with relatives, and so the boy used to make the trip once a week from Cairo to Alexandria for his violin lesson with the first of the three gurus, Prof Yashvili, a Georgian. This back and forth rhythm soon came to an end when, after a few years of what must have been an exhausting see-saw existence for a boy with the violin to carry, this particular professor left Egypt

and returned to Russia. So evaporated the most important element in the musical life of El-Mahdi. He never saw this man and loved the teacher who showed him a steep path that lay ahead for one who tackles the endless complexities of mastering the violin: king, devil, angel — so small, yet so formidable. The Russians understand it better than almost everyone. Yashvili lived to be 91 and died last year. He was followed by one professor Bedrize, also Georgian, who after a period was followed by a professor Ganich, an Azabagiani. Music was not the first choice for El-Mahdi as he veered between school and Conservatoire. His family wish was for a doctor. At about this time, the family went back to Alexandria and, at 16 years of age, he began medicine, the study of urology. After four years of this, studying what must have been increasingly frustrating labour, he decided finally to choose music. In 1985, when he was 26, he went to Switzerland, then to study chamber music in Geneva with the young Guy Michel Caillat. He actually played in two orchestras at the same time — one in Geneva, a chamber orchestra, and one of the same type in France, the Orchestre de Chambre du Jura. He was still student at this time. This was the floating life with a vengeance — positively planktonic. He played in these orchestras for four years and what had begun as a student effort ended as solid professionalism. The two orchestras gave a wide repertoire which he grew to love. In these moving days, he missed Cairo but time for biding much homesickness. He just went on grubbing scores, working and running.

And then the siren song — the Cairo Opera newly opened in its grand position on Gezira. This was a new challenge. In 1989, he came back. Trips and journeys soon end — who goes everywhere goes nowhere. The travelogue soon lost their colour. El-Mahdi had spent his years as a troubadour to good effect. And he was home again to a fresh page, with new understanding of his chosen instrument.

He worked with the Cairo Symphony and its various conductors — David, El-Saidi and Mustapha Nagui. He played through *Aida*, Puccini and went into Tchaikovsky's classical ballets. He married

He has a family. He has a city and now floats from Opera House to Gomhouria and the Citadel Festival and back again to the mother Opera House.

One of the larger gaps between musicians and their public is the almost constant moving, packing, sorting and waiting about that is the lot of all of them — stars or stand-ins. Few audiences know what this movement means, life is on a string of greetings and good-byes. El-Mahdi, from the beginning of this strange career, never sought the perfect life of the virtuoso. He is an orchestra player or more particularly a group player — duet, trio or quartet, widening to a string orchestra. Now, more than at any time since the last world war, smaller groups are producing new meanings and programmes of interesting music for bigger audiences. We must offer to the group players the same respect we do to the huge orchestras.

For Osman El-Mahdi there is something else more important than big or small, loud or soft: it is the violin itself. He has a beauty — a guarniture made by the firm in Cremona, but not made by the hand of Andrea himself. Violins must be fussed over, guarded, protected by humidifiers within their cases. Changes of temperature and humidity upset perilously. Playing them is a left hand, right hand collaboration — right hand is the master, left hand, the pupil, so say the Russian teachers. Anyway, the left hand is supposed to be easier to play than the right. Thin fingers make speed, plump fingers make tone, choose your player. El-Mahdi makes the strange explanation that the vibrations of the violin go right through the upper body. The tone and timbre come from it. There is no end to the projections this mystic cup or urn can produce.

Mad Pagini.

Weird and wild Zigeuner Gypsies.

The Franco-Belgian fat fingers.

The Russians, thin and brilliant.

These are the things that seem to envelope Osman El-Mahdi. About the violin, he says, everything flies.

Profile by David Blake

## Pack of cards

by Madame Sosostris



\* Royalty was upmost in my mind when I bumped into Her Imperial Highness, the Shahpouhan Farah Diba last week. The gracious lady visited Egypt to preside over a memorial service commemorating the death of her late husband, Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi, at the impressive Al-Rifa'i Mosque in the vicinity of the Citadel. She looked as splendid as always. Tall and imposing, both regal and demure, and with the sweetest, disarming smile imaginable, the former empress of Iran was accompanied by her charming mother and equally enchanting hostess Jihan Sadat. As you all know, my loves, the late Shah was granted political asylum and given sorely-needed sanctuary in Egypt, by the late Anwar Sadat. Mrs Sadat was accompanied by one of her stunningly beautiful granddaughters, the name escapes me at present. It brought back sweet memories of an age gone by. I scurried to greet the august party — gone are the days, dear, when everyone knew their place.

\* Next, I came down to earth, reliving my youth, and celebrated the wedding of Rasha Mazhar and Ashraf El-Sayed at the Novotel at Cairo airport. The hap-

py couple exchanged the nuptial vows amid tears of joy, much merriment and terrific utilisation. My eyes were fixed on the bride's sister, our very own Inas Mazhar, the sports editor at *Al-Ahram Weekly*. She looked ravishing in her emerald dress which perfectly matched her dazzling green eyes. Poor dear, Inas did not sleep a wink because she spent long sleepless nights working on the bride's dress. The embroidery was done by Inas and her mother Fathia. It took mother and daughter three months to complete their task. Moreover, Inas was busy covering the Atlanta Olympics during the past two weeks. Not that you could tell, for Inas was bubbling so loudly that I was not quite sure whether it was a question of sheer joy for her sister or a deliberate attempt to attract the

attention of potential suitors. The belly dancer did her bit too, but not to be outdone, the bride and groom got themselves into such a dancing frenzy that it really did feel like I was watching Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers. Poor things, they were so exhausted with dancing all night long that they missed their plane to Hurghada which was supposed to take off at 7am. In any case, they reissued their tickets the following day and went off for their honeymoon by the Red Sea. A fortnight later, the newlyweds will be off to Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, across the sea from Hurghada where Ashraf is working as a pharmacist. As for Rasha, she is content to be a housewife after a stint at the *Weekly* and after forgoing a promising career with the Egyptian American Bank.

\* There is nothing like burying your head into an engrossing book. With all the partying of the week, I spent the weekend paging through a new book written by Younsri El-Fakharani and entitled *Cities and Women*. The book, the author claims, is about the little details in the private lives of women. How on earth can a man know of such things? Well, my good friend Younsri has written two previous books. His first was *The Secrets of Gamal Abdel-Nasser and Abd-el-Halim Hafez*, and his second was *Private Lives*. Both his earlier works won national acclaim and were on the top of the bestsellers list for months on end. I wish him all the best with his latest book. He has the knack of cleverly combining scholastic research with entertaining storytelling that makes his

books sell like hotcakes. I reflected on his theory that every man must dwell on his own femininity to realise the full potential of his manhood. On that sombre note, my sweets, I fell into a very deep and restful sleep. I think it was the mesmerising effect of reading about the feminine mystique.

\* The Indonesian national day was celebrated on 17 August in the palatial grounds of the Indonesian Embassy in Garden City, and what an evening it turned out to be. The magical sounds of Javanese gongs filled the air and girls in glittering costumes and shimmering jewelry danced the night away. It was an oppressively hot and steamy day, much like the Indonesian capital Jakarta I would say, and there was a tropical air

to the place. But, Ambassador Boer Maan was cool as he and his lovely wife graciously greeted his guests. I did feel that I was back in Jakarta. Beautiful young maidens, colourfully clad in sarongs, hurried around with plates piled high with sweet meats and mouth-watering delicacies from some of the 17,000 islands of the Indonesian archipelago. I could not make up my mind whether to go for the fish dishes or the king prawn and lobster. Then there were the succulent kebab-like satay, dipped in a most delicious peanut butter sauce, juicy grilled meats, spicy seafood and tasty curries of all types. Indonesian food is certainly my very favourite and I kissed my diet good-bye as I dug into dessert, heavenly sweet meats exquisitely wrapped in banana leaves.

مكتبة الأصل